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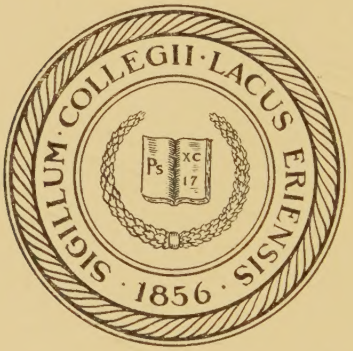

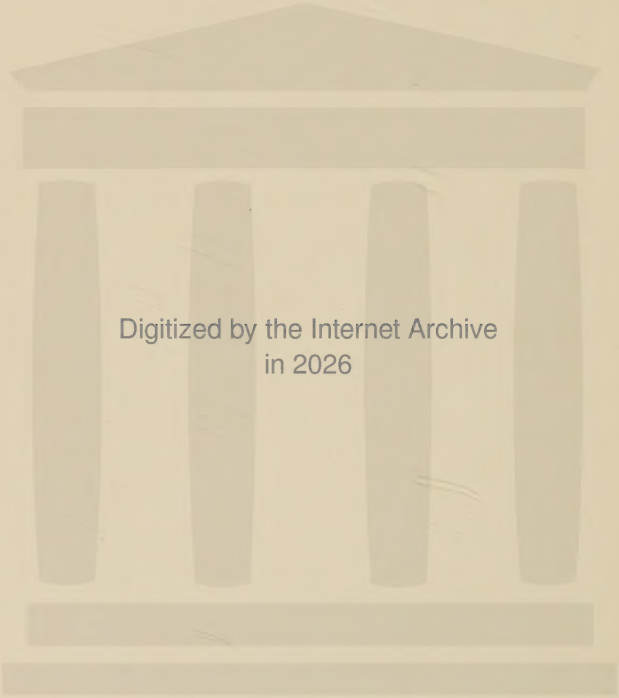
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REPRESENTATIVE PLAYS BY HENRY ARTHUR JONES

IN FOUR VOLUMES

VOLUME FOUR

REPRESENTATIVE PLAYS

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

IN FOUR VOLUMES

VOLUME ONE

The Silver King
The Middleman
Judah
The Dancing Girl

VOLUME TWO

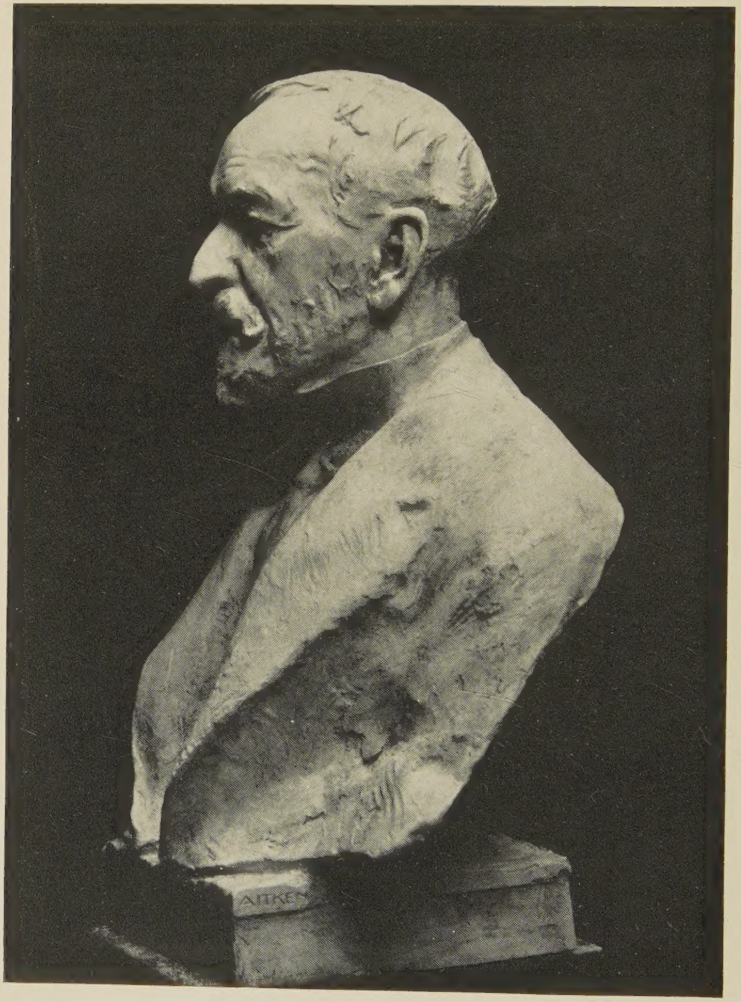
The Crusaders
The Tempter
The Masqueraders
The Case of Rebellious Susan

VOLUME THREE

Michael and His Lost Angel
The Liars
Mrs. Dane's Defence
The Hypocrites

VOLUME FOUR

Dolly Reforming Herself
The Divine Gift
Mary Goes First
The Goal
Grace Mary



HENRY ARTHUR JONES
From a portrait bust by Robert J. Aitken, 1911.

REPRESENTATIVE PLAYS

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

EDITED, WITH HISTORICAL, BIOGRAPHICAL,
AND CRITICAL INTRODUCTIONS, BY

CLAYTON HAMILTON

VOLUME FOUR

DOLLY REFORMING HERSELF
THE DIVINE GIFT
MARY GOES FIRST
THE GOAL
GRACE MARY

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1925

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INTRODUCTION

THE one point in which Henry Arthur Jones may be said unquestionably to excel all of his contemporaries in the English drama is his mastery of dialogue, especially in comedy. Setting aside as immature the pieces that he wrote before 1890, it can scarcely be denied that the plays of his maturity have been more consistently well written than those of any of his friendly rivals. His dialogue is always easy, fluent, graceful; it is always in character; it is always natural, without being vulgarly colloquial; and though it is never "literary" in the derogatory sense, it has the permanence of literature because it studiously refrains from dating itself by the use of slang expressions or other fashionable phrases that soon pass out of fashion.

It is, I think, a matter of particular importance for students of the drama to observe that, in the comic dialogue of Mr. Jones, there is a deliberate avoidance of the epigrammatic cleverness that was characteristic of Oscar Wilde, and of the verbal witticism that has been cultivated by Bernard Shaw. The French dramatic critics, whose standards are more definite than ours, are accustomed to distinguish three types of humour in the drama — the humour of words, the humour of situation, and the humour of character. Of these three types, the crudest and most easy is the first, and the most difficult and most artistic is the last. A verbal

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witticism is quotable apart from its context, and is therefore not inherent in the situation or the character; but the funniest lines in comedy are never quotable, because their humour is dependent on the fact that they are said in a certain situation or by a certain person.

In the dialogue of such comedies as "The Case of Rebellious Susan" and "The Liars", there is scarcely a line that could be quoted as funny in itself, because of its formula of words; and yet the dialogue as a whole is unfalteringly funny because of the people who speak the lines and the situations which inspire them. When extricated from their context, there is nothing witty in such remarks as "The sermon was a very long one," or "I must have taken the wrong turning"; yet, in their context, those two lines are among the most laughable in modern English comedy, and each of them assumes an added value in the play in which it figures, because it is repeated many times and becomes more mirth-provoking with every repetition. The same tests may be applied to that celebrated line of Molière's, "*Mais que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?*" Molière is regarded as the greatest comic dramatist that ever lived; yet in all his plays, and especially in those of his maturity, it would be scarcely possible to pick out a single witty line — a line, that is, which could be quoted for its verbal cleverness apart from its context of character and situation.

About fifteen years ago, Mr. Jones performed an interesting experiment. He took a large sheet of paper and ruled it into several columns devoted to the different sources of laughter in the theatre.

Then he attended a wide variety of dramatic and music-hall performances, and, whenever the audience laughed, he made a jotting in the appropriate column. After he had tabulated hundreds and hundreds of laughs, he found that far fewer had been evoked by verbal witticisms than by any other means.

In the decade of the eighteen-nineties, Henry Arthur Jones attained his full stature as a dramatist. The turning of the century occurred in his fiftieth year. Since 1900 he has produced a score of plays; but these have neither added materially to his reputation nor in any way subtracted from it. In the twentieth century, on the one hand, he has neither increased his range nor intensified his talents; but, on the other hand, he has suffered no diminution of vitality or retrogression in theatrical efficiency.

Throughout the first decade of the new century he devoted his attention almost entirely to comedy, and his favourite subject was the disintegrating effect of gossip. Two comedies of this period are particularly notable. These are "Whitewashing Julia" (1903) and "Joseph Entangled" (1904). Others, which may be mentioned for the sake of the record, are "The Princess's Nose" (1902), "Chance, The Idol" (1902), "The Chevaleer" (1904), and "The Heroic Stubbs" (1906).

"Whitewashing Julia," a study of the devastating influence of gossip on a small community, is a lifelike and entertaining comedy, but it was only mildly successful in the theatre. I think that the reason for its comparative non-success was the fact

that the author performed the dangerous experiment of continually promising to the audience a revelation which was never ultimately made. Mrs. Julia Wren is living in Shanctonbury under the shadow of an old scandal, said to have taken place in Homburg, and involving, according to report, "a puff-box, and a dressing-bag, and a tortoise-shell comb, and — wasn't there a lace dressing-jacket?" The audience is led from the outset to expect that, at the climax of the play, she will either be exonerated or else proved guilty; but, as the final curtain falls, the question of her guilt or innocence is still left hanging in the air. It is dangerous to play a trick of this sort upon an audience; and, in the theatre, it is always safer to assume that an unsatisfied suspense will be regarded finally as no more effective than no suspense at all.

"Joseph Entangled" is a light comedy, which treats deftly and delicately the same theme which was treated with intense seriousness in Echegaray's celebrated tragedy, *El Gran Galeoto*. The clever first act shows the audience how Sir Joseph Lacy and Lady Veronica Mayne happened accidentally to spend the night under the same roof in a London mansion which had been closed up for the summer season, without either of them being aware of the proximity of the other until breakfast time next morning. Lady Veronica has a very jealous husband; and the point of the play is that it is utterly impossible to make him believe a true account of what actually occurred. The audience has witnessed the actual circumstances; but any attempt to tell them and explain

them sounds so far-fetched that the innocent heroine and hero are forced to tell many lies in order to avoid the appearance of having participated in a guilty intrigue. They are forced into dishonour in their effort to persuade the irate husband that their behaviour has been honourable. This amusing comedy was obviously written by the author of "The Liars." It deserves to be included in the present Library Edition; but, since space is limited, the editor has yielded to the author's own preference for "Dolly Reforming Herself."

"DOLLY REFORMING HERSELF"

"Dolly Reforming Herself" was first produced in London on November 3, 1908. Just as "The Crusaders" had satirised the futility of an organised endeavour to reform humanity at large, so this new comedy poked fun at the customary New Year's resolution of the erring individual to improve himself by altering his character.

In my opinion, the pattern of this play is a little too symmetrical and formal. The structure is more obvious than in most of Mr. Jones's comedies; and, for this reason, it is possible for the audience to predict the course of the action in advance. But the characters are exceedingly lifelike; and the comedy culminates, at the end of the penultimate act, in one of the most admirable scenes that Mr. Jones has ever written. This is the remarkable quarrel scene between Dolly and her husband, in which these two characters seem to escape entirely from any control by the author and to turn into living human beings before our very eyes.

Of this passage, Mr. Max Beerbohm has said: "The whole scene is delightful, worked out with the finest sense of dramatic rhythm: a truly great comic scene, of which Mr. Jones may well be proud." And Mr. Arthur Bingham Walkley has praised it in the following unstinted terms: "The crescendo of quarrel is most skilfully and drolly arranged — a scene on classic lines boldly challenging and, what is more, maintaining comparison with Sheridan."

"Dolly Reforming Herself" was followed by "We Can't Be as Bad as All That" (1910), which was first produced in New York, at the Thirty-ninth Street Theatre. This piece was notable for the excellent comedy dialogue of its opening act and for a strong dramatic scene at its climax; but it was not successful in the theatre. I attended the first performance with Professor Brander Matthews, and I remember that we decided at the time that the main reason for the failure was the inadvertent omission of an obligatory scene which the audience had been led to expect in the final act.

"The Ogre", produced in London in 1911, was followed by "Lydia Gilmore", produced in New York by Margaret Anglin in 1912; but neither of these pieces was entirely satisfactory. Meanwhile, Mr. Jones was applying himself more seriously to a careful experiment in a new type of drama that should be more novelistic than theatrical.

"THE DIVINE GIFT"

Though "The Divine Gift" was written in 1912, it has not yet been produced or offered for pro-

duction. Instead, it was immediately published, with a lengthy prefatory dedication to Professor Gilbert Murray, who had predicted that a new renascence of the English Drama would soon supplant the renascence that had been initiated by Mr. Jones and his contemporaries at the outset of the eighteen-nineties. During the course of this preface, the author said facetiously of " The Divine Gift ","" The play is meant to be played whenever there appears to be a public demand for it. In the meantime have I not done the managers a good turn by removing from them all temptation to risk their money and the prestige of their theatre upon it? "

After analyzing in detail the extent to which the literary dramatist had been hampered by the eaves-dropping convention of the modern stage, Mr. Jones explained his purposes, in writing " The Divine Gift ", as follows:

" To be successful, a new formula is needed. Evidently all the interesting events in the lives of the leading personages, and all the interesting phases and developments of their characters, cannot be crowded into three or four acts of present direct progressive action because as I have already shown, this gives the impression of incredible melodrama, and allows scarcely any delineation of character. Therefore much of the action cannot be instantly and directly presented, but must be obliquely reflected from the past in sustained passages of kindled present emotion, or of kindled present curiosity, or of vivid comment. It is in these passages that literature may find its opportunity; for in this formula the eaves-dropping convention could largely abandon its present curt,

bald, choppy sentences. It could, however, retain its present natural and sincere tones and gestures.

"If such a formula could be established, the English drama could be made, not only to say something worth saying, but to say it in a manner that is worth heeding and dwelling upon; a play might again be made a vehicle of memorable and brilliant and distinguished conversation, without ceasing to tell a story. . . .

"The formula I have suggested, if it could be developed and perfected so as to become the accepted formula for serious work on our stage, would give the dramatist some of the novelist's freedom in dealing with shades and subtleties of character. If men of letters who want to write plays would take the time and trouble to master its difficulties, it would give them a worthy means of expressing themselves in the theatre. If our present eaves-dropping convention is to be retained, the formula that I am here suggesting is the only one that will afford to English literature anything more than a casual momentary union with the modern English drama."

The author's preface to "The Divine Gift" constitutes one of the most important of his contributions to dramatic criticism; and the editor regrets that its extreme length prevents its inclusion in entirety in the present Library Edition. But three or four of its most illuminating passages must be quoted in the present context.

Mr. Jones has this to say about the literary drama:

"Our so-called modern literary plays may for the most part be divided into three classes — those that are not plays; those that are not literature;

and those that are neither plays nor literature.

"Clearly, a literary play should, first of all, be a play. Its story, motives, and characters should be so plain and direct as to hold the interest of an average audience from beginning to end. It should stand the noisy test of representation on the boards.

"Clearly, a literary play should also be literature. If it is a play of modern life, its dialogue should be easy, colloquial, unstilted, unaffected, characteristic of each person speaking in each situation. It should carefully avoid being banal, commonplace, slangy, or smart and epigrammatic on the level of a cheap comic illustrated paper. It should stand the quiet test of reading in the study."

He argues, as follows, against the discussion of timely topics in the theatre and against the type of drama that "sets out to tackle the latest newspaper and political problems in the spirit and by the methods of the social reformer":

"If I may whisper a caution to young and aspiring playwrights, I would say, 'Never choose for your theme a burning question of the hour, unless you wish merely for a success that will burn out in an hour. If you wish your plays to live, choose permanent themes and universal types of character'."

He phrases thus his standards of critical judgment:

"If I may jot down a rough rule or two whereby we may estimate the permanent value of a piece of art or literature, I would state them thus: 'The form need not be perfect, if the substance is eternal. The substance need not be eternal, if the form is perfect. But form or substance, or both, must be prepared to stand very hard wear. Originality,

either of form or substance, is to be shrewdly suspected and questioned. Some element of beauty must enter into the composition.' "

Concerning the form of " The Divine Gift ", Mr. Jones has this to say:

" The construction of a play is the last virtue that should be apparent to the public, and the last virtue for which the author should claim recognition. It is, however, the first virtue which the author should set himself to acquire. Until the carpenter has learned the use of his tools, he cannot make a cabinet. The better and more seasoned the wood he has to work upon, the more is the pity he should spoil good material. And if he has only common or faulty material to work upon, fine workmanship is all the more needful to cover its defects. Let him therefore busy himself in his work-shop for seven years, and for yet twice seven years.

" The main design of the present play gave me scarcely an hour's labor. The scenes fell easily into the simplest arrangement. But the construction within each individual scene gave me infinite trouble and perplexity — more, indeed, than any play I have written. I hope this will not be obvious, and that it will escape the notice of any one who does not happen to read this preface.

" It is of no interest except to those who are concerned with the intricacies and devices of dramatic construction, and I merely mention it as a memorandum for their curiosity to note."

"MARY GOES FIRST"

Though Henry Arthur Jones was over sixty years of age when he wrote " Mary Goes First ", it is one of the most sprightly and vivacious of his

comedies; and its keen vitality clearly indicates that, if it had not been for the tragic interruption of the Great War, he would have continued his career as a comic dramatist with undiminished vigour for at least another decade. This play was first produced in London on September 18, 1913, with Marie Tempest in the leading rôle; and Miss Tempest brought it to New York the following season, and later played it in Australia, Canada, and South Africa. In all these widely separated English-speaking regions, the piece was signally successful.

In selecting the characters for "Mary Goes First", the author has descended a rung or two on the ladder of social precedence from the circle of society that he dealt with in "The Liars." Instead of exhibiting aristocrats, he has chosen to present people who are merely ambitious of aristocracy; and he makes fun of their innate inability to conform with the code of conduct which is an obligation of that nobility to which they ineffectually aspire. These people — to define them with a word that was lifted into literature by the late Clyde Fitch — are social "climbers"; and they are funny mainly because they fail to understand the principle that *noblesse oblige*.

This piece is almost utterly a comedy of character rather than a comedy of incident. Although, as we have seen, one of Mr. Jones's most conspicuous talents is his faculty for story-telling, he has managed artfully, in "Mary Goes First", to make his effect with scarcely any story at all. The piece narrates a single incident — which in itself is trivial — and exhibits the subsequent effect of this single

incident on the characters of all the people to whom it seems momentous. The plot of the play is purely psychological; and the action is developed not so much upon the stage as within the minds of the comically unimportant people who regard their destinies as hanging upon minor matters which the audience perceives to be absurd.

Attention should be directed to the technical dexterity which is displayed in the staging of this comedy. The entire piece is set forth in a single room — a room, moreover, which has only one door that is available for entrances and exits. To be sure, an adjoining room is partly displayed behind an opening that is hung with curtains, and this secondary room is employed as a means for the temporary withdrawal of certain characters from participation in the dialogue; but there is only one door through which the story — so to speak — is afforded communication with the outside world. This constricted stage-set was, of course, suggested to the author by the exigencies of his final curtain-fall. To accentuate the effect of what may be called — in the slang of the theatre — the " biggest laugh " of the comedy, it was necessary that there should be only one available exit from the scene; but so naturally has Mr. Jones arranged the entrances and exits of his characters that the hasty reader might not even notice that a scarcely precedented technical difficulty had, in this case, been accepted and surmounted.

No less admirable, in illustration of sheer craftsmanship, is what may be called the " time-scheme " of this play. Consider, for example, the novel advantage which the author has derived, in the

middle of his first act, from the device of lowering the curtain for a few seconds to indicate a lapse of time. By applying this device to indicate the passing of the dinner-hour, Mr. Jones has managed deftly to separate his women from his men, so that the altercation between Mary and Lady Bodsworth may take place in a purely feminine environment, before the men return from table. Consider also the cleverness of inventing a dressmaking establishment to account for the necessary minutes spent off-stage by Mary in the second act, and the skill with which Mr. Jones has brought the club, the railway station, and many other off-stage localities as clearly into the total map of his narrative as the single room which we actually see.

The dialogue of "Mary Goes First" is unfalteringly funny, and it affords a particularly brilliant instance of the device of humourous repetition. The word "impropriety" is by no means amusing in itself; and yet, whenever, in the later acts of this comedy, it trembles on the lips of the heroine, we laugh heartily at the reminiscence of a phrase in which the word was first singled out to our attention.

"THE GOAL"

Though Mr. Jones began his career in the eighteen-seventies by writing several one-act curtain-raisers, he has written very few one-act plays since attaining his maturity, for the reason that, till very recently, there was little call for them in the professional theatre. In 1915, Mr. Jones wrote, in regard to "The Goal":

"It is a discouraging sign that neither on the English nor American stage is there any demand

for one-act plays. These should be widely supported, as a valuable school for young playwrights and young actors. 'The Goal' was written in 1897, and I had to wait seventeen years before I could get anything approaching a suitable representation. It was produced by Mr. Holbrook Blinn at the Princess Theatre, New York, in October, 1914. It received very generous appreciation from the New York press, and I hope to offer it again to American playgoers."

Of course, the foregoing paragraph was written before the recent remarkable growth of the Little Theatre movement, which, particularly in America, has opened up a new market for one-act plays. "The Goal" is included in the present Library Edition because of its technical excellence and because of its impressive mood. We are confronted with the spectacle of a great man facing death; and we are not merely told that Sir Stephen Famariss is a great man, but are convinced of this fact by the reality of the characterization.

"GRACE MARY"

"Grace Mary", a tragedy in the Cornish dialect, in one act, was written by Mr. Jones to please himself; it is reprinted in this place in order to indicate emphatically the range and variety of his work. The author has playfully remarked that "however unlike it may be to a Shakespearean tragedy, it would probably be equally successful in keeping people out of the theatre"; but the fact is that "Grace Mary" is both intensely dramatic and appealingly poetic. It may be compared not unfavourably with John Masefield's "Tragedy of

Nan" and with the eloquent Irish peasant tragedies of John Millington Synge. It is a mystic little piece, and has an other-worldly wistfulness. It is lyric with a love of old, unhappy, far-off things and battles long ago.

After "Mary Goes First", the next play of Henry Arthur Jones was "The Lie", which, owing to the outbreak of the Great War, was produced in New York, in 1915, with Margaret Illington in the leading rôle. This was a serious drama, setting forth an intense struggle between two sisters of contrasted temperaments; and it enjoyed a successful run in the United States. But, after returning to England, Mr. Jones became so engrossed in the tremendous public problems of the time that he desisted from writing further plays and devoted his attention to the composition of polemical articles and books. Of these the most important is his treatise on "Patriotism and Popular Education". He has vigourously combatted the Bolshevistic tendencies of Mr. H. G. Wells, in a series of satiric letters which have been gathered into a book under the title, "My Dear Wells"; and, more recently, he has attacked the economic theories of Mr. Bernard Shaw. Concerning these activities, he wrote to me on April 25, 1923: "I have perhaps made a mistake in giving my last few years to political and social questions. But the war laid hold of me and I could not escape from it. If the time had not been so much out of joint, I think I could have done my best work for the English theatre in these same last few years."

An author's opinion of his own work, when it is

given frankly, honestly, and utterly without self-consciousness, is always peculiarly interesting and worthy of studious consideration. I have therefore decided, at the risk of a sacrifice of tact, to conclude this commentary with a quotation from a private letter which Mr. Jones, with no thought of publication, wrote to me on August 21, 1923, while this Library Edition of his representative plays was in the course of preparation:

"I have not ventured to intrude upon your criticism of my work with any suggestion of my own. I am sure you know that I wish you to say exactly what you think and feel about my plays. I am sadly conscious that I have not worked always upon my highest levels. That has been impossible in the conditions that the English theatre has imposed upon me. I think, however, that I may claim that I have always done the best work that there was a good chance of offering to the public. I think that my plays, taken as a whole, will give a truthful picture of English life and character from the year 1885 to 1915. I have drawn more English types in these years than any other English dramatist. And I have never put any character into a play without first realising it vividly to myself. I do not think that I can be accused of any inconsistency of motive or character in any of my personages. Granted the situation, I think I may say that my characters have behaved naturally in it. I hope you won't consider that I am advancing too large a claim for my work as a whole. Nor do I seek to influence your opinion of it."

CLAYTON HAMILTON.

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DOLLY REFORMING HERSELF

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

TO MISS ETHEL IRVING

My Dear Miss Irving,

Will you accept the dedication of this little comedy, whose success at the Haymarket was so largely due to your fine and sincere performance of Dolly?

Faithfully yours,

Henry Arthur Jones.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I. The Drawing-Room at Harry Telfer's — The Gables, Crookbury Green, Surrey. Time: the afternoon of 1st January, 1907.

ACT II. The same. Time: after dinner on the same day.

ACT III. The same. Time: later on the same night.

ACT IV. The same. Time: the afternoon of 1st January, 1908.

"Dolly Reforming Herself" was originally produced at the Haymarket Theatre, London, November 3, 1908.

Original Cast

Harry Telfer, Dolly's Husband	Mr. Robert Loraine
Matthew Barron, Dolly's Father	Mr. C. M. Lowne
Captain Lucas Wentworth, Dolly's Cousin	Mr. Charles R. Maude
Professor Sturgess	Mr. E. Lyall Swete
The Reverend James Pilcher, Vicar of Crookbury	Mr. Herbert Bunston
Criddle	Mr. Gilbert Porteous
Mrs. Harry Telfer (Dolly)	Miss Ethel Irving
Mrs. Sturgess (Renie)	Miss Margaret Halstan
Peters, Dolly's Maid	Miss Ada Webster

DOLLY REFORMING HERSELF

ACT I

SCENE. *Drawing-room at Harry Telfer's, The Gables, Crookbury Green, Surrey. A well-furnished room in a modern red-brick country house. At the back, a little to the right, is a door leading into the hall. All along the right side is a glass partition, showing a conservatory which is entered by glass doors, one up stage, the other down. On the left side is a large fireplace. At the back, in the centre, is a handsome writing-desk with a shut-down flap lid. Above the fireplace, facing the audience, is a large sofa. To the right of sofa, and below it in the left centre of the room, is a small table, and near to it an easy-chair. Right centre down stage is a larger table. Time, the afternoon of 1st January, 1907.*

Discover at writing-table, back to audience, Dolly Telfer, a bright little woman about thirty, busied with bills and papers. Bending over her, back to audience, is her father, Matt Barron, a pleasant-looking, easy-going cynic of sixty. Harry Telfer, Dolly's husband, an ordinary good-natured, weakish, impulsive Englishman, about thirty-five, is standing with his back to the fire. Sitting on sofa, reading a scientific book, is Professor Sturgess, a hard, dry, narrow, fattish scientific man about forty-five. At the table, right, reading a French novel, is Renie Sturgess, the Professor's wife, a tall, dark, handsome woman about thirty.

HARRY. No, I can't say that I pay very much attention to sermons as a rule, but Pilcher gave us a regular downright, no-mistake-about-it rouser at the Watch-night Service last night.

MATT (*turning round*). I wonder what precise difference this rousing sermon will make in the conduct of any person who heard it.

HARRY. Well, it's going to make a lot of difference in my conduct. At least, I won't say a lot of difference, because I don't call myself a very bad sort of fellow, do you?

MATT. N-o — No —

HARRY. At any rate I'm a thundering good husband, ain't I, Dolly? (*Dolly takes no notice.*) And I've got no flagrant vices. But I've got a heap of — well, a heap of selfish little habits, such as temper, and so on, and for the coming year I'm going to knock them all off.

MATT. That will be a score for Pilcher — that is, if you do knock them off.

HARRY. Oh, I'm thoroughly resolved! I promised Dolly last night, didn't I, Dolly? (*Dolly takes no notice.*) Dolly too! Dolly was awfully impressed by the sermon, weren't you, Dolly?

MATT (*looking round at Dolly's back*). Dolly was awfully impressed?

HARRY. Yes. Before we went to bed she gave me her word that, if I'd give her a little help, she'd pay off all her bills, and live within her allowance for the future, didn't you, Dolly?

MATT. Well, that will be another score for Pilcher — that is, if Dolly does live within her allowance.

HARRY. Oh, Dolly means it this time, don't you, Dolly?

DOLLY (*turns round on her stool, bills in hand*). I think it's disgraceful!

MATT. What?

DOLLY. These tradespeople! (*Comes down to Matt.*) I'm almost sure I've paid this bill once — if not twice. Then there's a mistake of thirty shillings in the addition — You're good at figures, Dad. Do add that up for me. My head is so muddled.

[*Giving the bill to Matt.*

HARRY. Aren't you glad, Doll, that you made that resolution not to have any more bills?

DOLLY. It will be heavenly! To go about all day with the blessed thought that I don't owe a farthing to anybody. It's awful!

[*Crunching a bill in her hand, and throwing it on writing-table.*

HARRY. Cheer up, little woman! You don't owe such a very alarming amount, do you?

DOLLY. Oh, no! Oh, *no!* And if you'll only help me as you promised—

HARRY. We'll go thoroughly into it by-and-bye. In fact, I did mean to give you a pleasant little Christmas surprise, and pay off all your debts.

DOLLY. Oh, you angel! But why didn't you do it?

HARRY. I've done it so often! You remember the last time?

DOLLY (*making a wry face*). Yes, I remember the last time.

HARRY. And here we are again!

DOLLY. Oh, don't talk like a clown!

HARRY. But, my dear Dolly, here we are again.

DOLLY. Well, I haven't got the money sense! I simply haven't got it! I was born without it!

MATT (*hands her the bill*). The addition is quite correct.

DOLLY (*taking the bill*). You're sure? Then I'm convinced I've paid it! (*Looking at bill.*) Yes! Thirty-four, seven, six. Professor Sturgess—

PROFESSOR (*looks up from his book*). Yes?

DOLLY. You understand all about psychology and the way our brains work.

PROFESSOR. I've given my entire life to their study, but I cannot claim that I understand them.

DOLLY. But wouldn't you say—

PROFESSOR. What?

DOLLY. I'm morally certain I've paid this bill.

MATT. Have you got the receipt?

DOLLY. No! I must have mislaid it.

MATT. When and where did you pay it?

DOLLY. I cannot recall the exact circumstances. And now —

MATT. And now — ?

DOLLY. Fulks and Garner have sent me a most impertinent note requesting immediate payment.

PROFESSOR. What is the particular brain process that you wish me to explain?

DOLLY. How do you account for my having the most vivid impression that I've paid it — so vivid that I cannot shake it off?

PROFESSOR. Well — a —

MATT. Isn't it an instance of that obscure operation of the feminine mind whereby the merest wish becomes an accomplished fact?

DOLLY. My dear Dad, I actually remember the exact amount: thirty-four, seven, six. Thirty-four, seven, six. I shall never enter Fulks and Garnet's shop again!

[*Enter Criddle.*

CRIDDLE (*announcing*). Captain Wentworth!

[*Enter Captain Lucas Wentworth, a good-looking, smart young army man about thirty. He is in riding-clothes. Exit Criddle. At Captain Wentworth's entrance, Renie shows keen interest, throws him a secret glance as he goes to shake hands with Dolly.*

DOLLY. Ah, Lu! What, over again! Happy New Year once more!

LUCAS. Same to you. (*Shaking hands.*) Happy New Year, everybody! Good afternoon, Harry!

[*Nods to Harry.*

HARRY. Ditto, Lu.

LUCAS. Ah, Uncle Matt! Happy New Year!

[*Shaking hands.*

MATT. Happy New Year, Lucas!

LUCAS. Good-afternoon, Mrs. Sturgess.

[*Shaking hands with Renie.*

RENIE. Good-afternoon.

LUCAS. None the worse for your outing last night, I hope?

RENIE. Oh, no, I'm sure Mr. Pilcher's sermon ought to make us all very much better.

DOLLY. May I introduce you to Professor Sturgess — my cousin, Captain Wentworth.

LUCAS. How d' ye do?

PROFESSOR. How d' ye do?

MATT. So you came over to the Watch-night Service, I hear?

LUCAS. Yes! I 'd nothing much better to do, and Dolly was cracking up this new parson of yours, so I thought I 'd jog over and sample him.

MATT. A dozen miles over here at midnight; an hour's service in a cold church; and a dozen miles back to Aldershot, in the sleet and snow. I hope the sermon thoroughly braced you up!

LUCAS. It did. It made me feel just as good as I knew how to be.

MATT. Here 's another score for Pilcher!

DOLLY. Dad, I think it 's shocking bad taste of you to keep on sneering at Mr. Pilcher!

MATT. I 'm not sneering. I 'm only curious to follow up this wonderful sermon, and trace its results on all of you.

DOLLY. Well, you can see its results. (*Lucas has got near to Renie, stands with his back to her, takes out a letter from his coat-tail pocket, holds it out for her to take. She takes it, pops it in her novel, and goes on reading. He moves away from her.*) Take only our own family. Harry and I both have turned over a new leaf. Renie, you said Mr. Pilcher had set you thinking deeply —

RENIE. Yes, dear, very deeply.

DOLLY. Lu, you said the sermon had done you a lot of good.

LUCAS. Heaps! I won't say I'm going to set up for a saint straight off, because — well — I'm not so sure I could bring it off, even if I tried —

MATT. That's what holds me back, my wretched nervous fear that I should n't bring it off. Still, in justice to Pilcher, I hope you're not going to let his sermon be wasted.

LUCAS. Oh, no! My first spare five minutes I'm going to brisk about, and do a bit of New Year's tidying up.

[*He is standing over Renie, who has opened his letter in her novel; he again exchanges a secret look of understanding with her, and makes a sign to her to go into the conservatory.*

[*Enter Criddle.*

CRIDDLE (*announcing*). Mr. Pilcher!

[*Enter the Reverend James Pilcher, a big, strong, bright, genial, manly, hearty English parson about forty. Exit Criddle.*

DOLLY. How d' ye do?

[*Shaking hands.*

PILCHER. How d' ye do? Happy New Year, once more! Happy New Year, Mr. Barron!

MATT (*shaking hands*). A happy New Year.

PILCHER. How do again, Telfer?

HARRY. How are you?

PILCHER. Good-morning, Mrs. Sturgess.

RENIE. Good-morning.

[*At Pilcher's entrance she has hidden her French novel behind her in the chair. In shaking hands with Pilcher, it drops on to the floor and Lucas's letter drops out. Lucas goes to pick it up; Mr. Pilcher is before him, picks up the novel and letter, and hands them to Renie. In taking them, she shows some confusion.*

PILCHER (*genially*). Improving the New Year by getting a thorough knowledge of Parisian life and manners, I see.

RENIE (*confused*). No!—I had begun the book a week ago and so I thought—a—I'd better finish it.

LUCAS. Good-morning, Mr. Pilcher.

PILCHER (*shaking hands*). Good-morning.

LUCAS. Rattling good sermon you gave us last night.

PILCHER. I'm glad you though it worth coming so far to hear.

LUCAS. Not at all. Jolly well worth coming for, eh, Mrs. Sturgess?

[*With a sly little look and shake of the head at Renie.*

RENIE. I thoroughly enjoyed it!

PILCHER (*a little surprised*). Enjoyed it! Now I meant to make you all very uncomfortable!

DOLLY. Oh, you gave us a good shaking up, and we deserved it! I don't think you've met Professor Sturgess?

PILCHER (*advancing to Professor*). No, but I've read his book, "Man, the Automaton."

PROFESSOR (*bowing*). Not with disapproval, I trust?

PILCHER (*shaking hands very cordially*). With the most profound disapproval, with boundless, uncompromising dissent and antagonism!

PROFESSOR. I'm sorry!

PILCHER. Why, you deny that man has any vestige of free will.

PROFESSOR. Certainly. The longer I live, the more I'm convinced that free will is a purely subjective illusion.

DOLLY. Do you mean that when I will to do a certain thing, I can't do it? Oh, that's absurd. For instance, I will to go and touch that chair! (*She goes and touches it.*) There! (*Triumphantly.*) I've done it! That shows I've got free will. (*The Professor shakes his head.*) Well, then how did I do it?

PROFESSOR. I affirm that your willing to touch that chair, or not to touch it; your actual touching it, or

not touching it; your possession or non-possession of a criminal impulse —

DOLLY. I haven't any criminal impulses —

PROFESSOR (*shakes his head and goes on*). Your yielding to that criminal impulse or your not yielding to it — all these states of consciousness are entirely dependent upon the condition, quantity, and arrangement of certain atoms in the grey matter of your brain. You think, you will, you act according as that grey matter works. You did not cause or make that condition of the atoms of your grey matter, therefore you are not responsible for thinking or acting in this way or that, seeing that your thoughts, and your actions, and that direction of your impulses which you call your will, are all precisely determined and regulated by the condition and arrangement of these minute atoms of your grey matter!

DOLLY (*has at first listened with great attention, but has grown bewildered as the Professor goes on*). I don't care anything about my grey matter! I've quite made up my mind I won't have any more bills!

PILCHER (*turning to Renie*). Does Mrs. Sturgess agree with the Professor's doctrine?

RENIE. No, indeed! To say that we're mere machines — it's horrid.

PROFESSOR. The question is not whether it's horrid, but whether it's true.

PILCHER. What do you think, Mr. Barron?

MATT. It's a very nutty and knotty problem. I'm watching to see Dolly and Harry solve it!

DOLLY. See us solve it! How?

MATT. You and Harry heard a most thrilling, soul-stirring sermon last night.

PILCHER. You had good hearsay accounts of my sermon?

MATT. Excellent! I should have heard it myself, but I've reached an age when it would be dangerous to

give up any of my old and cherished bad habits. So in place of going to church and selfishly reforming myself, I shall have to be content with watching Dolly and Harry reform themselves.

DOLLY. Don't take any notice of him, Mr. Pilcher; he's the most cynical, hardened reprobate! I have to blush for him a hundred times a day.

[*Renie strolls casually into conservatory by lower door. Lucas casually follows her.*

MATT. And in order to settle once and for all this vexed question of free will and moral responsibility, I'll bet you, Harry, a simple fiver, and I'll bet you, Dolly, a new Parisian hat, and half a dozen pairs of gloves, that you won't live up to your good resolutions, and that on next New Year's Day you'll neither of you be one ha'penny the better for all the wise counsels Mr. Pilcher gave you last night.

HARRY. A fiver! Done!

DOLLY. I'll take you, too! In fact, I'll double it; two new Parisian hats, and a dozen pairs of gloves!

MATT. Done, my dear!

PILCHER. I hope I shan't be accused of talking shop if I venture to recall that betting was one of the bad habits I especially warned my congregation against, last night!

HARRY. By Jove, yes — I'd forgotten all about that! Of course, if you wish us to cry off —

PILCHER. Well, not exactly. I might perhaps suggest an alternative plan which was tried with great success in my late parish —

DOLLY. What was that?

PILCHER. A very capital good fellow — an auctioneer and land surveyor, my churchwarden in fact, by name Jobling — found that, in spite of constant good resolutions, certain small vices were gradually creeping upon him. There was an occasional outburst of temper to

his clerks, an occasional half-glass too much; and on one lamentable market day, he actually discovered himself using bad language to Mrs. Jobling—

DOLLY (*looking at Harry*). Oh! Ah!

MATT. Jobling's grey matter can't have been in good working order.

PILCHER. We corrected that! We got his grey matter under control.

DOLLY. How?

PILCHER. My Christmas Blanket Club happened to be on the road to bankruptcy. By the way, our Blanket Club here is in low water. Well, I gave Jobling a small box, with a hole at the top sufficiently large to admit half a crown. And I suggested that whenever he was betrayed into one of these little slips, he should fine himself for the benefit of my Blanket Club—

HARRY. Good business! Dolly, where's that collecting-box they sent us from the Hospital for Incurables?

DOLLY. In the cupboard in the next room.

HARRY. Right-o! No time like the present!

[*Exit Harry.*

MATT. And how did you get out of this dilemma?

PILCHER. Dilemma?

MATT. Did your Blanket Club remain in bankruptcy, or, what must have been an even more distressing alternative to you, did Jobling continue to use bad language to his wife?

PILCHER. We struck a happy medium. My Blanket Club balance was considerably augmented, and Jobling's behaviour considerably improved under the stress of the fines.

[*Re-enter Harry with an old, dusty collecting-box, on which is printed in large letters, "County Hospital for Incurables."*

HARRY (*placing the box on the table*). There! My name's Jobling for the present! By Jove! that was a very neat idea of yours.

PILCHER. Ah, by the way, I didn't give you Jobling's tariff —

HARRY. Tariff?

PILCHER. Jobling's tariff for a mild little profanity like "By Jove," was a mere sixpence.

HARRY. Oh!

[*Feels in his pocket.*

PILCHER. Of course, you needn't adopt Jobling's scale.

HARRY. Oh, yes! I'll toe the mark! (*Takes sixpence out of his pocket and puts it in his box.*) I'm determined I'll cure myself of all these bad little tricks —

MATT (*to Dolly, pointing to the money-box*). Are you going to contribute?

DOLLY (*snappishly*). Perhaps, when I've paid off my bills.

MATT (*to Pilcher*). Will you kindly let my daughter have your lowest tariff for ladies?

DOLLY. Oh, please don't be in such a hurry. What about your own contribution? Mr. Pilcher, I hope you don't intend to let my father escape.

PILCHER. I understood that Mr. Barron was prepared to risk a five-pound note that you and Mr. Telfer will not carry your New Year resolutions into practice?

MATT. With the almost certain chance of drawing a five-pound note from Harry and a new hat from Dolly.

PILCHER. I'm afraid I can't hold out those inducements. But I can offer you the very pleasing alternatives of chuckling over your daughter's and Mr. Telfer's lapses, or of contributing five pounds to an excellent charity!

MATT. H'm! Well, I'll do my best to oblige you, Mr. Pilcher! Let me see!

[*Looking round, his eye falls on Renie and Lucas, who, at the beginning of the above conversation, have gone into conservatory at lower door, and now come out again at upper door. She has a hot-house flower*

in her hand, and they are eagerly absorbed in their conversation, the Professor talking to Harry and not noticing.

RENIE (*becoming aware that Matt is watching them*). Yes, that arrangement of the stamens is quite unusual. It's what the gardener calls a "sport"—

LUCAS (*examining the flower*). Jolly good sport, too!

MATT. I'm not sure that we have n't even better sport here—

RENIE (*coming to him*). Sport? What sport? Can we join?

MATT. That's just what I was going to propose. There are four of you here who heard Mr. Pilcher's excellent discourse last night. And you are all determined to turn over a new leaf this year. Is n't that so?

DOLLY. Yes!

HARRY. I know I am.

MATT. Mrs. Sturgess?

RENIE. Yes, indeed!

MATT. Lucas, you?

LUCAS. Yes, uncle.

MATT. On the first of January next, I am prepared to put a sovereign in that money-box for every one of you who can honestly declare that he has broken himself or herself of his bad habits during the year.

LUCAS. I say, not all our bad habits?

MATT. H'm. I don't wish to be exacting—I've no doubt each of us has his own little failing or weakness. Well, come to me and say on your honour that you 've conquered this or that pet special weakness—and in goes my sovereign.

LUCAS. You don't really mean it?

MATT. Indeed I do. I hope you won't stand out and —spoil sport, eh?

LUCAS. Oh, I don't mind coming in—just for the lark of the thing.

MATT. Then you all agree?

DOLLY. Oh, yes.

HARRY. Certainly.

MATT. Mrs. Sturgess?

RENIE. We don't know where we may be next Christmas.

DOLLY. You 'll be here with us. I invite you on the spot. You accept?

RENIE. Yes, delighted, if my husband —

PROFESSOR. Very pleased.

MATT. Well, Mr. Pilcher, I think I've made your Blanket Club a very handsome offer.

PILCHER. Very handsome. (*Taking out watch.*) I hope our friends will cordially respond, for the sake of my Blanket Club.

DOLLY. You 'll stay for a cup of tea?

PILCHER. I've heaps of New Year's calls to make. I'm afraid I must be going; good-afternoon, Professor!

PROFESSOR. Good-afternoon.

PILCHER. Good-afternoon, Telfer.

HARRY. Good-afternoon.

PILCHER. Good-bye, Mrs. Sturgess.

RENIE. Good-bye. So many thanks for your eloquent sermon.

[*Shaking hands.*

PILCHER. Now, was I eloquent? I suppose I was, since I've produced such an invigorating New Year atmosphere.

[*Renie moves her French novel.*

MATT. And brought Lucas over from Aldershot in the snow!

LUCAS. Rather! I shall come again next year.

[*Shaking hands.*

PILCHER. Do. And then we shall be able to estimate the effect of my eloquence.

MATT (*tapping the money-box*). We shall!

PILCHER. Good-bye, Mrs. Telfer.

DOLLY. Good-bye.

[*Rings bell.*

PILCHER. Good-bye, Mr. Barron.

MATT. Good-bye.

PILCHER. You might be inclined to risk a sovereign on yourself for the Blanket Club?

MATT. I daren't. I can't trust my grey matter — I should make a dreadful fiasco.

[*Criddle appears at door.*

PILCHER. Mrs. Telfer, I leave him in your hands.

[*Exit Pilcher. Criddle closes the door after him.*

MATT. Dolly, I don't mind having that new Parisian hat on with you.

DOLLY. Done! I don't mind how much I punish you.

PROFESSOR (*taking out his watch*). Half-past three, my dear.

RENIE. I don't think I'll go out this afternoon.

PROFESSOR. Oh, you'd better take your little constitutional. You missed it yesterday. I'm sure your restlessness is due to your not taking regular exercise.

RENIE. Which way are you going?

[*Yawns.*

PROFESSOR. My usual round, up to the White House and back by the fish-pond.

RENIE. Perhaps I'll join you at the fish-pond.

PROFESSOR (*to Matt*). Nothing like living by rule and measure.

MATT. I shouldn't wonder. I've never tried it.

PROFESSOR. I ascribe my constant good health and contentment to my unvarying routine of work and diet and exercise.

[*Exit Professor.*

MATT. Then where do my constant good health and contentment come from?

LUCAS. Dolly, I left my evening kit here. Could you put me up for the night?

DOLLY. Delighted! You'll make up our rubber.

LUCAS. Right!

MATT. Not going to ride back to Aldershot again to-night?

LUCAS. Not to-night, thank you.

MATT. Just a shade too bracing, eh?

LUCAS. Just a shade! Dolly, I haven't seen your new fish-pond. Is anybody going to meet the Professor? [*Glancing at Renie.*

MATT. I am. (*Linking his arm in Lucas's.*) We'll get into an unvarying routine of exercise for the next hour. Come along!

[*Takes Lucas off as he is exchanging a look with Renie. Renie makes to follow them, stops at door, turns back a little, stops, takes out Lucas's letter from her French novel, goes to fire and reads it. Meanwhile the following scene takes place between Dolly and Harry.*

HARRY (*to Dolly*). Now, Dolly, we can go through your bills.

[*Going to her writing-desk.*

DOLLY. Yes. Had n't I better sort them out first?

HARRY (*taking up bills*). Oh, I'll help you sort them out —

DOLLY. Take care! You'll muddle all my papers. (*Taking bills out of his hands, and closing down the writing-desk.*) I want to have a little talk with Renie — you'd better join them at the fish-pond.

HARRY. Well, so long as you do get them sorted, and squared up. What about after tea?

DOLLY. All right. After tea.

HARRY. After tea. We'll have a nice cosy half-hour, all to ourselves, and sweep them all out of our minds.

[*With a gesture.*

DOLLY (*nods cheerfully*). Yes, a nice cosy half-hour and sweep them all out of our minds. (*With his gesture. Exit Harry briskly. She repeats his gesture.*) Sweep them all out of our minds. (*Opening desk and regard-*

ing bills with dismay.) Oh, don't I wish I could! Oh, Renie!

[*Renie is busy with her letter at the fire.*

RENIE (*puts letter into pocket*). What is it?

DOLLY (*has taken up one or two bills*). These bills! These awful bills! These vampires!

RENIE. Yes, dear! I suppose it's rather dreadful, but it must be sweet to have a dear, kind husband who 'll pay them all off.

DOLLY. Harry? He made a dreadful fuss last time. And then I didn't show him all.

RENIE. Well, dear, after all, it's only bills—

DOLLY. Only bills! Only? Well, I'm going to show him every one this time. And what a lesson it shall be to me! That's why I'm so grateful to Mr. Pilcher.

RENIE. Why?

DOLLY. Yesterday afternoon I thought I'd screw up my courage to go through the bills just to see where I was. My dear, I was paralysed! I had the most appalling time! Well, Mr. Pilcher's sermon came just in the nick of time. I thought what an idiot I must be to endure all this misery just for want of a little resolution.

RENIE. Mr. Pilcher's sermon came just in the nick of time for me too.

DOLLY. Did it?

RENIE. I had an awful afternoon yesterday!

DOLLY. You? You haven't any bills?

RENIE. No! (*Sighs.*) I almost wish I had.

DOLLY. Wish you had?

RENIE. I almost envy you the delicious experience of having to confess—

DOLLY. Yes, dear, you always were fond of scenes, but I'm not!

RENIE. And then the heavenly feeling of being forgiven, and taken in the arms of the man you love!

DOLLY. Yes, that part of it is all right. It's what comes before—

[*With a little shudder.*

RENIE. After all, your husband is n't a machine. He is a human being!

DOLLY. Oh, Harry's a perfect dear in most things, but he has got a temper!

RENIE. My husband never even swears at me! Oh, Dolly, you are lucky!

DOLLY. Hum!

RENIE. Oh, Dolly—

[*Sighs and goes away.*

DOLLY. Is anything the matter?

RENIE. No, dear. Nothing, except—oh, life is so hard! so hard!

DOLLY. Renie, if you're in trouble—

RENIE. Thank you, dear. I knew you'd help me.

DOLLY. Yes, so long as it is n't money. And even then I'd help you, only I can't.

RENIE. It is n't money.

DOLLY. Then what is it?

RENIE (*looking at Dolly curiously*). I wonder if you would understand.

DOLLY. I'll do my best.

RENIE. It's such a strange story. (*As she moves away, Dolly makes a little dubious grimace behind her back. Renie suddenly comes up to Dolly very effusively.*) Dolly, I will trust you. You know I thoroughly admire and honour my husband.

DOLLY (*a little startled*). Ye—es.

RENIE. You know that nothing could ever induce me to wrong him for a moment?

DOLLY. No—

RENIE. Nothing could be further from my thoughts.

DOLLY. No—but is there anybody—Renie, who is it?

RENIE. Give me your sacred promise you'll never breathe a word to any living soul?

DOLLY. Not a word — who is it?

RENIE. Not even to your husband?

DOLLY. Not even to my husband.

RENIE. Nor to him?

DOLLY. Him? No, of course not. Who is it?

RENIE. Well, dear, you know what my life has been. Few women have met with so little real sympathy as I. Few women have suffered —

DOLLY. No, dear. Who is it? Do I know him?

RENIE. Your cousin Lucas has a deep and sincere admiration for me.

DOLLY. Lu! Lu! Of course! I might have known he 'd never ride a dozen miles in the snow for a sermon! It 's disgraceful of him!

RENIE. No, dear, he 's not to blame. We are neither of us to blame.

DOLLY (*contemptuously*). Oh! Why, you have n't known him a month, have you?

RENIE. I met him for the first time in this room three weeks ago last Thursday afternoon.

DOLLY. It 's a great pity the Professor did n't come down with you.

RENIE. That would have made no difference. It had to be!

DOLLY. What had to be? Renie, how far has this gone? You 've been meeting him alone —

RENIE. Once or twice.

DOLLY. You 've slipped away every afternoon this week.

RENIE. However often I may have met him, he has offered me nothing but the most chivalrous attention. He has always respected me —

DOLLY. Well, then, he must n't respect you any more. It must be stopped.

RENIE. Dolly, I did n't expect you to take up this attitude.

DOLLY. You don't suppose I 'm going to have this sort of thing in my own house, do you?

RENIE. What sort of thing?

DOLLY. Do you remember the awful row I got into at school when your boy's love letter was discovered in the Banbury cakes you 'd persuaded me to take in for you?

RENIE. But you received Banbury cakes of your own!

DOLLY. Not since I've been married. Of course before your marriage your outrageous flirting did n't much matter—

RENIE. Outrageous flirting? If I seemed to flirt—

DOLLY. Seemed!

RENIE. It was only in the vain hope of meeting with one who could offer me the perfect homage that I have always felt would one day be mine.

DOLLY. Well, he must n't offer it here! I shall tell him so very plainly. He 'd better not stay to dinner.

RENIE. There is no reason Captain Wentworth should not stay to dinner. He has given me the one absolutely blameless, unselfish devotion of his life. I've accepted it on that distinct understanding. I've trusted you with my secret, a secret honourable alike to Captain Wentworth and myself. You've promised not to breathe a word to any living soul. You surely don't mean to break your word?

DOLLY. I don't mean to stand the racket of your Banbury cakes.

RENIE. I did n't expect you to be so unsympathetic. You promised to help me!

DOLLY. Help you! How did you expect me to help you?

RENIE. My husband has to go to Edinburgh next week to give a course of lectures there.

DOLLY. Well?

RENIE. He wants me to go with him. Dearest, it would be perfectly sweet of you to ask me to stay on another fortnight here.

DOLLY (*makes a little movement of indignant surprise*). I see!

RENIE. There could be no possible harm in it now that you know our attachment is quite innocent and that you can look after me every moment. Dearest, you might oblige me in a tiny little matter like this.

DOLLY (*after a pause*). I'll think it over—

RENIE. Thank you so much.

DOLLY. Renie, you said Mr. Pilcher's sermon came just in the nick of time—

RENIE. So it did.

DOLLY. You don't call this the "nick of time"?

RENIE. Yes, indeed. I went to church in a perfect fever. I didn't know what to do. Well, as I listened to Mr. Pilcher, everything became quite clear to me. I resolved I would accept Captain Wentworth's pure, unselfish devotion and make it a lever to raise all my ideals and aspirations!

DOLLY. But there wasn't anything in Mr. Pilcher's sermon about—

RENIE. Oh, yes, there was a lot about ideals and aspirations.

DOLLY. Yes, but not the sort of aspirations you have for Lucas. I suppose you know he makes love to every woman he comes across?

RENIE. He told me he had been led into one or two unworthy attachments.

DOLLY. Yes! That's quite right. So he has! One or two!

RENIE. That was before he met me.

DOLLY. Yes, and this will be before he meets the next lady.

RENIE (*looks at Dolly severely*). My dear Dolly, with your light frivolous nature it is impossible for you to understand a pure and exalted attachment like ours. Listen! (*Taking out a letter.*) This will show you his fine nature, his fine feelings—"From the first moment I saw you—"

(*Matt enters.*)

(*Putting letter in pocket.*) Well, have you had a pleasant walk?

MATT. Very pleasant — and instructive. The Professor asked me to remind you that he's waiting for you at the fish-pond.

RENIE. I'd better go. I shall get a little lecture all to myself if I don't. (*Going off, to Dolly.*) Thank you, dear, so much, for your kind invitation to stay on!

DOLLY. Don't mention it!

RENIE. I shall try to manage it.

[*Exit Renie.*

DOLLY. Yes, I'm sure you will.

MATT. Mrs. Sturgess going to stay on?

DOLLY. She wants me to invite her. But I won't if I can help it. (*Goes to him suddenly.*) Dad!

MATT. Well?

DOLLY. That wretched Lucas!

MATT. What about him?

DOLLY. No, I've promised her not to breathe a word. So you must guess. (*Pause.*) Have you guessed?

MATT (*after a pause*). Yes. Well, I — (*Begins to chuckle.*) So Lucas is up to his old games!

DOLLY. My own guest! Under my own roof! It's too horrid of him.

MATT (*chuckling*). It is! It's too bad! The rascal!

DOLLY. Oh, it's more than half her fault! It's just like her! (*Matt suddenly bursts from a chuckle into a roar.*) What are you laughing at?

MATT. I've just left — (*chuckling*) — I've just left the Professor down at the fish-pond explaining to Lucas all about his grey matter, and —

[*Roars.*

DOLLY. I don't see anything to laugh at.

MATT. Twelve miles in the snow — I say, Doll, we're making a splendid start for the New Year!

[*Laughing.*

DOLLY. Dad! Will you please leave off? (*Shaking his shoulder.*) Will you be serious?

MATT. Yes, my dear!! (*Pulling himself together and straightening his features.*) Yes, I will. After all, it's a serious matter.

DOLLY. It's very serious for me, in a neighbourhood like this!

MATT. It's serious for me, as I was Lucas's guardian. And it's serious for him. If he goes and plays the fool, it may spoil his career — the young ass!

DOLLY. Very well, then, will you please treat it seriously and set to work and help me?

MATT. How far have matters gone?

DOLLY. Oh, there's no real harm done at present.

MATT. How do you know?

DOLLY. Oh, Lucas is writing her silly letters and she's talking about his pure and exalted devotion, and making it a lever to raise all her ideals and aspirations.

MATT (*shakes his head*). That looks bad! That looks very dangerous for her.

DOLLY. Oh, no; she knows how to take care of herself. But it's dangerous for me!

MATT. How, dangerous for you?

DOLLY. If there's the least bit of scandal, she'll contrive to drag me into it! I know her so well.

MATT (*walking about, cogitating*). Yes, and we must n't let Lucas make a mess of it.

DOLLY. What can we do?

MATT. When I was over at Aldershot last week, Sir John said something about giving Lucas an A. D. C. in India. I'll drive over to-morrow and ask Sir John to pack Lucas out of the country for a year or two!

DOLLY. That's a good idea. But it may take some time?

MATT. A week or so, perhaps more.

DOLLY. But if they find out they're going to be parted, it is just this next week when there will be all the danger.

MATT. That's true.

DOLLY. They ought to be parted to-night.

MATT. They ought! They ought! Not a doubt about it! Not a shadow of doubt! They ought to be parted to-night.

DOLLY. Dad! I believe I can frighten Renie out of it.

MATT. Frighten her?

DOLLY. I'll try! And you must take Lucas in hand—

MATT. H'm! Isn't Harry the right person—?

DOLLY. No, I shan't tell Harry. Harry would only get into a temper and muddle it. No, you must get Lucas to take himself off.

MATT. Take himself off!

DOLLY. I won't have him here. You can tell him so. Be very severe with him.

MATT (*dubious*). H'm!

DOLLY. Take a very high tone.

MATT. I'm not sure that taking a high tone is quite in my line.

DOLLY. Then please try it. Dad, you do realise how very serious this is, don't you?

MATT. Yes, of course. Very well, I'll tackle Lucas. We'll see what a high tone will do with him. Heigho! Sad! Sad!! Sad!!!—Sad! Sad!! Sad!!!

DOLLY. Hush!

(*Lucas and Harry enter. Lucas looks round for Renie. Dolly and Matt talk in whispers as if settling a plan. Harry goes up to the collecting-box, takes out his knife and begins to scrape off the label.*)

(*In a very severe tone to Lucas, who is peeping into conservatory.*) Are you looking for anything?

LUCAS. I was wondering whether there was any tea going.

DOLLY (*same severe tone*). The tea is not in the conservatory.

LUCAS. No, but I thought it might be getting on to the time—

DOLLY (*same tone*). The tea will be served in due course.

LUCAS (*surprised at her tone*). Is anything the matter?

[*Dolly looks at him severely, says nothing, turns to Matt. Lucas looks puzzled, goes away, and again looks furtively into conservatory for Renie.*

HARRY (*scraping away at the collecting-box*). Don't forget, Doll — our cosy half-hour after tea —

[*Nodding at the writing-desk.*

DOLLY. I won't forget.

MATT (*has come up behind Harry, touches the arm he is scraping with*). Hospital for Incurables! I should n't scrape that off at present.

CURTAIN

(*Four or five hours pass between Acts I and II.*)

ACT II

SCENE. *The same, on the same evening, after dinner. The sofa is now brought down below the fireplace, and fronts the audience a little diagonally, its right end being farthest up stage. The small table with the hospital box, and the easy-chair are above the sofa, a little to the right of it.*

Enter Renie, much distressed and agitated. Dolly follows quickly, closes the door cautiously and mysteriously.

RENIE. But I don't understand. Captain Wentworth and I have been so little together —

DOLLY. Well, my dear, there it is! My father is the last man to pry into other people's affairs, but you see it has been forced upon his notice. And from the tone he took —

RENIE. What tone?

DOLLY. He was very severe.

RENIE (*alarmed*). But what did he say he had seen?

DOLLY. He would n't go into particulars. He seemed very much upset —

RENIE. Upset!

DOLLY. Perhaps I ought to say shocked.

RENIE. Shocked!

DOLLY. And when my father is shocked, it must be something very glaring —

RENIE (*more and more alarmed*). But there has n't been anything glaring —

DOLLY. Well, dear, of course, you know.

RENIE. But I cannot imagine — (*Suddenly.*) It must have been that day at the stile!

DOLLY. Perhaps. What happened? No, I don't wish to hear —

RENIE. Captain Wentworth assisted me over the stile —

DOLLY. Well?

RENIE. That's all. He may have taken a little longer about it than was quite necessary, and I may have leaned a little heavier than the circumstances required. But it was all done in perfectly good taste.

DOLLY (*shakes her head*). It can't have been the stile.

RENIE. Then what — ? (*Cudgels her brains.*) The dairy!

DOLLY. Very likely. Was that very — no, don't tell me —

RENIE. There's nothing to tell. The woman at the farm, Mrs. ——

DOLLY. Biggs —

RENIE. Biggs, asked me to go over her model dairy.

DOLLY. Did she ask Lucas?

RENIE. He came. Mrs. Biggs insisted on our tasting her mince pies —

DOLLY. Mince pies? Yes?

RENIE. While she went to get one —

DOLLY. Get one —

RENIE. She was n't out of the dairy ten seconds —

DOLLY. No — and then?

RENIE. Captain Wentworth — a —

DOLLY. Respected you!

RENIE (*firing up*). He is always most respectful! In the most delicate, exquisitely chivalrous way, he implored me for one first and only kiss, and just as I was refusing him, somebody passed the dairy windows —

DOLLY. My father often strolls that way —

RENIE. But I was quite cold and correct — (*Very anxiously.*) Dolly, tell me exactly what Mr. Barron said.

DOLLY. At first he was going to speak to you himself; but I said, "No, that's my duty! I'm her oldest friend; I'll talk to her!"

RENIE. Ye—es?

DOLLY. So, at last he consented, and said: "Very well. Be very firm with her, because this sort of thing taking place under my very nose and under my daughter's roof is what I can not, and will not, tolerate for one moment!"

RENIE. He must have passed the dairy windows!

DOLLY. Yes.

RENIE. And jumped to a wrong conclusion.

DOLLY. Yes. And that isn't the worst—

RENIE (*freshly alarmed*). Not the worst?

DOLLY. Now, don't be alarmed, dear—

RENIE. About what?

DOLLY. Didn't you notice something strange in your husband's manner at dinner?

RENIE. No. What makes you think—?

DOLLY. My dear, if my father noticed it, why not your husband? Suppose all this time the Professor has been quietly, stealthily watching you and Lucas.

RENIE (*alarmed*). Dolly!

DOLLY. And waiting his time—

RENIE. Oh, Dolly!

DOLLY. Didn't you notice how he insisted on your going to the fish-pond?

RENIE. Yes, he did!

DOLLY. Didn't it strike you there was something in that?

RENIE. No, and he hasn't said anything—

DOLLY. Of course not. Naturally he would hide his suspicions from you till the right moment.

RENIE. Right moment?

DOLLY. Now, dear, you see how serious things are. You mustn't run any more risks. This must be broken off to-night.

RENIE. To-night?

DOLLY. Now, what can I do to help you?

RENIE. You might tell Mr. Barron there was nothing in the dairy windows.

DOLLY. Of course I'll tell him, but if he saw —

RENIE. But there was nothing. Absolutely nothing —

DOLLY. No, dear. What else can I do?

RENIE. Could you find out exactly how much he has seen and heard, and — a — pump him a little?

DOLLY. I don't like pumping people — Still — What else?

RENIE (*breaking down*). Oh, Dolly, this blow could not have fallen at a more cruel moment.

DOLLY. No, dear.

RENIE. It came just when I had lost all the illusions of girlhood, when all my woman's nature began to cry out —

DOLLY. Yes — (*Suddenly.*) Hark! (*Listens.*) Hush! [*Creeps up to door, listens, opens it, looks out, closes it again.*

RENIE. What was it?

DOLLY. Hush! Voices! I thought it might be Lucas and the Professor quarrelling.

RENIE. I really don't think my husband suspects —

DOLLY. No, I daresay it's only my imagination.

RENIE. And if he did — Dolly, is there one man living, except my husband, who would condemn me for being the object of a noble, single-hearted devotion like Captain Wentworth's?

DOLLY. No, dear, perhaps not. But, you see, as husbands they take quite a different view of things from what they do merely as men.

RENIE. Tell me candidly, Dolly, you see nothing wrong in it, do you?

DOLLY. Well, dear, when you say wrong —

RENIE. But I assure you there is n't — nothing could be further from my thoughts.

DOLLY. No, dear — still, people are so full of prejudice — Now what can I do?

RENIE (*clasping Dolly's hand warmly*). Oh, Dolly, you can help me so much.

DOLLY (*a little alarmed*). Can I? Tell me —

RENIE. If Lucas and I are parted — (*Breaks down.*) I can't bear it! I can't bear it!

DOLLY. Try, dear! Try!

RENIE (*sobbing*). I will. And if at any time I long to hear how he bears our separation, you won't mind receiving a letter, and sending it on to me?

DOLLY. I'm afraid I couldn't do that, dear. You see, I'm so careless, and if I left the letter about, and Harry found it — No, dear —

RENIE. You won't help me?

DOLLY. Yes, dear, I'll do anything in my power! (*Suddenly.*) I'll tell you what I can do!

RENIE. Yes?

DOLLY. My father is telling Lucas he must leave tonight. Well, I can spare you all the pain and misery of saying good-bye, and take one last message to him.

RENIE (*curtly*). No, thank you. It's most unkind of you to send him away like this. I must see him alone before he goes.

DOLLY (*shakes her head*). My father insists; and suppose Lucas feels that he owes it to your reputation to go quietly —

RENIE. Without seeing me?

DOLLY. And suppose the Professor is really watching you — (*Renie shows great perplexity. Dolly is watching her.*) If you don't see Lucas, what message shall I take him?

RENIE. Tell him how proud I am of his noble, unselfish devotion; tell him I shall always look upon it as the one supreme happiness of my life to have known him —

[*The Professor and Matt enter. The Professor has*

diagrams and illustrations in his hand. Following the Professor and Matt are Harry and Lucas. Lucas, after a little time, comes up to Dolly and Renie, who are seated on sofa. The Professor is speaking to Matt as he enters, and is showing him an illustration.

PROFESSOR (*in his hard, metallic voice*). Observe that woman's facial angle — (*pointing*) the peculiar curve of the lip, and the irregular formation of the nose.

[*Describing a little upward curve on the paper with his thumb.*

MATT. I have seen sweeter things in ladies' lips and noses.

[*Describing the same little upward curve with his thumb on the paper.*

PROFESSOR. Can you be surprised at her history?

MATT. Who was she?

PROFESSOR. Jane Sweetman, the notorious trigamist. Looking at that woman's cranium, I maintain it was impossible for her to avoid —

MATT. Committing trigamy?

PROFESSOR. Well, some species of grave moral delinquency.

[*Dolly clutches Renie's wrist significantly. The Professor hands the illustration to Harry, who examines it. Matt moves away a step and unobtrusively feels his own nose and forehead.*

HARRY (*has examined the illustration*). By Jove, yes — anybody can see she was bound to come a moral cropper, eh?

[*He hands the illustration to Dolly, who passes it to Renie, with a very significant glance, pointing out something on the paper. Lucas leans over the back of the sofa between Renie and Dolly, to look at the illustration. As he leans on the back of the sofa, Dolly draws herself up very indignantly; gives him a severe look; moves a little away from him; sits and looks very severely in front of her. He cannot under-*

stand her attitude, draws back a little and looks puzzled.

PROFESSOR (*bringing out another illustration and offering it to Matt*). Now look at this.

MATT (*taking illustration*). Somebody's brains!

PROFESSOR. Tell me if you notice anything peculiar.

[*Harry leans over Matt's shoulder, and looks at the illustration. Lucas again leans over the sofa, between Dolly and Renie. Dolly again moves a little further away from him with another indignant look. Lucas is again puzzled, but bends and looks over the illustration in Renie's hands.*

LUCAS. So that's Jane Sweetman! Well, if Jane was bound to come a moral cropper, I'm very glad I was n't bound to come a moral cropper with Jane, eh, Dolly?

[*Very pleasantly.*

DOLLY (*very severely*). I should scarcely have thought you troubled whom you came a moral cropper with!

[*Looks at him severely, goes up to writing-desk, seats herself and writes letter. He feels himself snubbed, and moves a step or two back, stands and looks puzzled. Professor has been critically regarding Matt and Harry, who have been looking at the illustration.*

PROFESSOR. Well, does anything strike you?

MATT. No. (*Holding it out.*) Looks rather pulpy — rather — a — squashy —

PROFESSOR. Exactly! Observe the soft, almost watery condition of that grey matter. What is the inevitable consequence?

MATT. I could n't quite say — Whom did that grey matter belong to?

PROFESSOR. Harriet Poy.

MATT. I don't remember Harriet —

PROFESSOR. The Pyromaniac. At the age of four set fire to her mother's bed. At twelve was found saturating blankets with petroleum; at sixteen fired three hay-

ricks, for which she was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

MATT. Poor Harriet! But of course if her grey matter went and got watery —

PROFESSOR. Just so! I maintain that with her grey matter in that condition it was a stupid crime to send her to prison.

DOLLY (*looking round from desk*). But what are we to do with people whose grey matter goes wrong?

PROFESSOR. I propose to deal with that question at Edinburgh. (*To Matt.*) You might, perhaps, care to run down to Edinburgh for my lectures —

MATT. I should love it above all things; but the fact is, I'm so thoroughly of your opinion —

PROFESSOR. Are you? I'm delighted I've convinced you.

MATT. Completely. All my life I've been doing things I should never have dreamed of doing if my grey matter had done its duty and not got watery.

HARRY (*begins*). Yes, when you come to think of all the rotten things you find yourself doing, you feel, by Jove —

[*Suddenly recalls that he has said "by Jove," and being near the collecting-box, he quietly pulls sixpence out of his pocket and drops it in.*

MATT. Bravo, Harry!

[*Patting him.*

HARRY. Oh, I mean it! — Professor, is n't it time for our hundred up?

PROFESSOR (*taking out watch*). In two minutes.

HARRY. I'll go and get the balls out and chalk the cues. (*Going up to door.*) Doll (*taps the writing-desk*), you put it off after tea — by-and-bye, you know!

DOLLY (*she has finished letter, has risen, and closed writing-desk*). By-and-bye.

HARRY. Before we go to bed — don't forget.

DOLLY. Oh, I shan't forget.

[*Makes a wry face. Exit Harry.*

PROFESSOR. Renie, you were complaining of headache. It would be wise to take a short stroll in the cool air.

RENIE. Oh, very well.

PROFESSOR. Wrap up thoroughly. Ten minutes, not longer.

[*Exit Professor. Dolly, unseen by Renie and Lucas, slips the note she has been writing into Matt's hands. He takes it down stage, right, and reads it. Renie and Lucas have been talking, apart; they move towards the door to get out, but Dolly is standing in the way of their exit.*

DOLLY. Oh, Renie! I'll put on my things, and come with you.

RENIE. But Captain Wentworth has offered—

DOLLY. I've a splitting headache—I must get a little air. And Dad wants to have a talk with Lucas, don't you?

MATT. If he can spare five minutes.

LUCAS. Won't by-and-bye be just as convenient?

DOLLY (*facing Lucas, speaking firmly*). No, by-and-bye will not be just as convenient. Now, Renie, we'll leave them together.

[*Gets Renie off, turns, looks daggers at Lucas, goes off after Renie, closes door in his face. He opens it, and goes after her.*

LUCAS. I say, Doll, what's up? (*Follows her off.*) What's the matter?

MATT (*reading Dolly's note*). "Be very severe with him. Make a great point of the dairy windows. He'll understand." Dairy windows?

[*Puts the note in his pocket, as Lucas re-enters, puzzled and disappointed.*

LUCAS. I can't think what's the matter with Dolly. She has done nothing but snub me all the evening.

MATT (*looking at him sternly*). So I should imagine!

LUCAS (*startled by his manner*). I say, have I done anything?

MATT. Done anything! I'm a man of the world! nobody can accuse me of being strait-laced, and therefore I suppose you think you can come here and set at defiance all the— It's disgraceful!

LUCAS. Would you mind telling me what you're hinting at?

MATT. I'm not hinting! I'm going to speak out very plainly, and I tell you that I look upon your conduct as something atrocious!

LUCAS. I say, uncle, what's all this about?

MATT. What's it about? What's it about? It's about the dairy windows!

LUCAS. Then it was you—phew!—so it was you?

MATT. Well, after the dairy windows, can you stand there and tell me you aren't thoroughly, completely, heartily ashamed of yourself?

LUCAS. Well, I suppose I am. But, after all, it was n't so very bad—

MATT. Not bad?

LUCAS. Well, not so d——d awful.

MATT (*regards him for a few moments*). Well, I'm astonished! If you don't consider your behaviour d——d awful, will you please find me some word that will describe it?

LUCAS. You know you're putting a much worse construction on this than the necessities of the case demand.

MATT. What!

LUCAS. I've nothing to reproach myself with. Mrs. Biggs was n't out of the dairy three minutes, and you were hanging about the windows all the time.

MATT. I was hanging about the windows?

LUCAS. Yes, and I must say that, when you saw two people engaged in an interesting conversation, the least you could do was to pass on and take no notice.

MATT. "Interesting conversation"!

LUCAS. Well, what did you call it? If it comes to that, what do you accuse me of?

MATT. Well, here you are, on the first day of the year, after listening to a most eloquent sermon, after making a solemn resolution to give up all your bad habits —

LUCAS. Excuse me, I expressly stated that I didn't mean to give up *all* my bad habits. And I don't call this a bad habit.

MATT. You don't call making love to a married woman a bad habit?

LUCAS. Of course, in one sense it is a bad habit. But it isn't a bad habit in the sense that other bad habits are bad habits. Look at all the decent chaps who've been led into it!

MATT. That doesn't excuse you. And if you think that I'm going to countenance your conduct, you are very much mistaken in your estimate of my character.

LUCAS (*very quietly*). May I ask you one simple question?

MATT. Well?

LUCAS. When you were my age, if you found yourself alone in a dairy with a good-looking woman, and she was good for a dozen kisses or so, wouldn't you have taken advantage of it?

MATT. No!

LUCAS. Not at my age?

MATT. No — no —

LUCAS. Well, what would you have done?

MATT. I should have summoned all my resolution —

LUCAS. Oh, that be hanged! Come, uncle, no humbug! Man to man!

MATT. Well, I don't say that at your age I might not have been tempted — and of course we must all go through a certain amount of experience, or how should we be able to advise you youngsters?

LUCAS. I say, no confounded nonsense — your Uncle Archie —

MATT. Dear old chap!

LUCAS. What use did you make of his advice?

MATT. Well, I remember his talking to me very seriously — I suppose I was about your age — did I ever tell you, Lucas (*taking Lucas's arm affectionately*), about a very remarkable auburn-haired girl, Madge Seaforth?

LUCAS. No.

MATT. And my racing her across Salisbury Plain at night?

LUCAS. No.

MATT. Forty-eight miles one glorious May night! I let her beat me! God bless her! I let her beat me! And just as the sun rose we caught sight of Salisbury spire.

LUCAS. Sounds rather jolly!

MATT. Jolly? And the bacon and eggs we got through for breakfast! Jolly? It was romance! It was poetry! Ah! Lu, my boy, you may say what you like, there's nothing like it on this side heaven. I told you about Mrs. Satterwaite dressing up as a widow and selling her husband?

LUCAS. No?

MATT. Well, I bet the little hussy a fiver. Oh, Satterwaite richly deserved all he got — I can see Satterwaite's face now, and hers, as she stepped out of the cupboard, with the wickedest twinkle in the wickedest black eye! Ho! Ho! Heigho! Sad! Sad!! Sad!!! — Sad! Sad!! Sad!!! Come, come, Lucas! This won't do! This will never do! Now to get back to this business of yours —

LUCAS. Well —

MATT. When I was your guardian, I let you have a pretty good fling?

LUCAS. You did!

MATT. The pace was rather scorching?

LUCAS. Rather!

MATT. I never pulled you up?

LUCAS. No, and I'm grateful.

[*Shaking hands very cordially.*

MATT. That's all right. Now, old chap, you've got to pull up!

LUCAS. Pull up?

MATT. Short. This Mrs. Sturgess — Dolly says there's a lot of nonsense going on, gushing letters and so on, — damned silly thing writing letters, Lu —

LUCAS. Yes, I know.

MATT. Well, what do you do it for?

LUCAS. I don't know.

MATT. You're seeing her every day. If you must carry on this tomfoolery, why not do it by word of mouth? Why write it down, to show what an ass you've been?

LUCAS. I'm sure I don't know.

MATT. Do you know why you're carrying on with her at all?

LUCAS. Well, naturally a chap — naturally —

MATT. You're either in love with her, or you aren't?

LUCAS. I can't say I'm exactly in love with her —

MATT. Then why are you making love to her?

LUCAS. Well, she's a jolly good-looking woman, and naturally a chap — naturally — I don't know that I ain't a bit in love with her.

MATT. Well, it doesn't much matter. If you aren't in love with her, you're a fool to risk a scandal. If you are in love, you'll most likely do some silly jackass thing that will knock your career on the head, eh?

LUCAS. Well, when you look at it that way —

MATT. Look at it that way! Anyhow, she's a married woman, and you're here as a guest — it isn't the right thing to do, is it?

LUCAS. No, it isn't.

MATT. Very well, then, don't do it. Don't do it! Cut it! You will?

LUCAS. I've got to, I suppose.

MATT. Yes, you've got to. You can tell Doll I gave

it to you hot and strong, and you're going to clear out, and not see Mrs. Sturgess again —

LUCAS. Not see her again?

MATT. Isn't that what you mean to do?

LUCAS. Yes, I suppose. I say, what did you see at the dairy windows?

MATT. I didn't see anything at all!

LUCAS. Nothing at all?

MATT. I wasn't there!

LUCAS. Then how — ?

MATT. Dolly put me up to it.

[*Laughs at him.*

LUCAS. Dolly?

[*Dolly enters with a cloak, which she throws on sofa.*

MATT. Ah, Doll —

DOLLY (*looking severely at Lucas*). Have you spoken to him?

MATT. Yes, very seriously, extra seriously, and he's going to do the right thing and clear out, aren't you, Lucas?

LUCAS (*a little unwillingly*). Yes.

MATT (*clapping him on the shoulder*). Good chap! Good chap!

DOLLY (*still a little severe*). I'm pleased to hear it. (*To Lucas.*) You've behaved in a most scandalous —

MATT. He has. I've told him all that. (*Winks at Dolly to keep her quiet.*) And he sees it quite plainly, don't you?

[*Winks at Lucas to prompt him.*

DOLLY. Then it's quite broken off?

MATT. Quite! Isn't it, Lu?

LUCAS. Yes, I suppose. I should like to say —

DOLLY. Yes?

LUCAS. That nothing has taken place which, if rightly looked at, could reflect discredit either upon the lady, or, I hope, upon myself. And secondly, whatever fault there may have been is entirely mine.

MATT. That's satisfactory! It always ought to be the man's fault. Heaven forbid it should ever be theirs. Good chap! Good chap! (*Patting him.*) Dolly, he's behaving splendidly. Now, Lu, good-night.

[*Dolly rings bell.*

LUCAS (*surprised*). Good-night?

DOLLY. Good-night, and good-bye!

[*Holding out her hand.*

LUCAS. You aren't going to turn me out to-night!

DOLLY. You said it was quite broken off.

LUCAS. Yes, but — (*Turns to Matt with appealing gesture.*) Uncle, you did n't mean to pack me off like this —

MATT. Yes, my boy! Remember the occasion. First day of the New Year. Take time by the forelock. Off you go!

[*Taking him by the shoulder and trying to get him off.*

LUCAS (*resisting*). Oh, no! I don't see it in that light at all.

[*Sinks comfortably into arm-chair. Criddle appears at door.*

DOLLY. Criddle, please have Captain Wentworth's portmanteau taken to the billiard-room.

CRIDDLE. Yes, ma'am.

DOLLY. He wishes to change there; and please send to the Red Lion and ask them to have Captain Wentworth's horse saddled.

CRIDDLE. Yes, ma'am.

[*Going.*

LUCAS. Criddle, what's the weather like?

CRIDDLE. It's a bit colder, sir. Looks as if we were going to have another heavy fall of snow.

LUCAS. I don't think I'll go to-night, Criddle. If I want the gee saddled, I'll go and tell them myself.

CRIDDLE. Yes, sir.

[*Exit Criddle.*

LUCAS (*in arm-chair*). I say, Dolly, you don't really expect me to go careering over that heath at this ungodly hour?

DOLLY. You can't stay here. Renie is very much upset; she has had hysterics. So I've put her in the spare room.

LUCAS. Well, you can give me a shake-down somewhere — in the billiard-room.

DOLLY (*shakes her head*). I can't ask the servants to make up impossible beds in impossible places at this ungodly hour.

LUCAS. I call this beastly unfair of you, Doll.

DOLLY. Unfair?

LUCAS. Just as I'd summoned up all my resolution to do the right thing, and avoid ructions for your sake, you pounce down on me, and order me off the premises, and —

DOLLY (*getting angry*). If you don't behave yourself and go off quietly, I shall have to order you off the premises.

[*Makes an appeal by gesture to Matt to get him off.*

MATT. Now, my hero! (*Lifting him out of the arm-chair.*) Buckle on your armor! Sally forth! Once more unto the breach!

[*With some difficulty he raises Lucas out of the chair.*

LUCAS. Well, I'll go and have a look at the weather. (*Goes sulkily up to door.*) Mind you, if you turn me out, I won't be responsible if there's a flare-up —

DOLLY. Very well, so long as we don't have a flare-up here. Oh!

[*Rings the bell again.*

LUCAS (*goes off, sulky, muttering*). Of all the — Turning me out — beastly infernal nuisance!

[*Exit Lucas, grumbling, leaving door open.*

DOLLY. It would serve them both right if there was to be a flare-up — only I'm sure she'd drag me into it somehow. (*Criddle appears at door.*) Please send and

ask them at the Red Lion to saddle Captain Wentworth's horse and send it here at once.

CRIDDLE. Yes, ma'am.

[*Exit Criddle.*

DOLLY. Lucas is going to behave as badly over this as he did over the governess. Dad—

MATT. Well?

DOLLY. Of course, Lucas is in the army, but surely he —he is n't a fair sample?

MATT. Oh, no, oh, no! Lucas is very exceptional — quite exceptional.

DOLLY. I thought so! They can't all be—

MATT. Oh, no! I 'm glad to say—

DOLLY. I 'm determined he shall go to-night.

[*Lucas re-enters.*

LUCAS. I say, Dolly, I wish you 'd come and look at the weather.

DOLLY. What for?

LUCAS. There's a great black cloud — it 's going to come down!

DOLLY (*enraged*). I don't care if the heavens come down! You 're going back to Aldershot to-night.

LUCAS. But I tell you— (*Appeals to Matt.*) It 's simply impossible for me to ride across that heath—

MATT. But you rode across it last night in a howling snowstorm—

LUCAS. Yes, I did! Last night! And never again, thank you! No! I don't mind shaking down anywhere to oblige— (*He is about to drop again into the arm-chair, but Matt gently pushes him aside and drops into the chair himself. Lucas goes to sofa.*) Anywhere to oblige!

[*Drops comfortably on to sofa.*

DOLLY (*comes up to him finally*). Lucas, this is abominable! I suppose you think because we treated you so leniently over that wretched governess—

LUCAS. Well, I thought you were pretty deuced hard down on us—

DOLLY. What? Oh!

[*Appeals to Matt.*

LUCAS. I didn't mind your slanging me, but you might have had a little consideration for her feelings, because, after all, she was one of your own sex!

DOLLY. My own sex! The minx!

LUCAS. And an orphan!

DOLLY. Orphan! (*To Matt.*) Go and speak to him! Go and speak to him!

[*Matt rises and goes to Lucas. Dolly sits down in despair.*

MATT. Come, Lu. You're not playing the game! You promised to take yourself off.

LUCAS (*comfortably seated*). Well, I will take myself off, only let me take myself off in my own way.

DOLLY. It's useless your staying! Renie won't see you again.

LUCAS. Won't she?

DOLLY. No. She gave me a last message for you —

LUCAS. Did she? Why didn't you give it to me?

DOLLY. If I tell you, will you take yourself off?

LUCAS. Yes, of course. What was her last message?

DOLLY. She said she should always value your noble devotion, and be proud that she had known you; but you must see how hopeless it was, and that she trusted you would go away at once and leave her to respect you, as you had always respected her!

MATT. A very pretty, touching little adieu! Does her great credit. Now, Lu! Cut it! Come, my boy!

[*Lifts him up off sofa. Lucas gets up very reluctantly.*

LUCAS. Well, if I must go — good-night!

MATT. Good-night. (*Shaking hands.*) I may see you to-morrow afternoon.

LUCAS. Where?

MATT. I'm driving over to Aldershot to see Sir John. I shall look you up —

LUCAS. I may not be there in the afternoon —

DOLLY. Lucas, you 're coming over here —

LUCAS. No — no; I 'm not. You should n't suspect me.

DOLLY. It won't be the least use your coming —

LUCAS. I know that. Well, good-bye, Doll —

DOLLY. Good-bye.

[*Shaking hands.*

LUCAS (*is going up to door slowly and reluctantly; turns*). I suppose if I were to give you my solemn promise I would n't see her, I could n't shake down on that sofa.

DOLLY (*sternly and decisively*). No!

LUCAS (*goes a few more steps towards door; turns*). *I* suppose I could n't see Mrs. Sturgess? (*Dolly looks indignant.*) Only to say good-bye?

DOLLY. No! She was nearly undressed when I left her. She 's asleep by now!

(*Enter Renie fully dressed, looking very interesting and tearful. Throughout the scene she preserves the air of a martyr.*)

(*Indignantly.*) Renie, you promised me you would n't come downstairs again!

RENIE. Yes, dear, but I felt I could n't rest under your father's unjust suspicions. (*Goes up to Matt, seizes his hand sympathetically.*) Dolly tells me you have been watching the friendship that all unconsciously has sprung up between Captain Wentworth and myself —

MATT (*uncomfortable*). Not exactly watching —

RENIE. I feel you may have seen, or guessed, something that has given you a wrong impression.

MATT. No, no! I assure you —

RENIE. If you have, I beg you to speak out and give us a chance of defending ourselves. Tell us exactly what you have seen, and what you suspect —

MATT. My dear Mrs. Sturgess, I have n't seen anything, and I don't suspect anything.

RENIE. You really mean that?

MATT. Yes — yes —

RENIE (*clasping his hand eagerly*). Thank you so much. Friendship between a man and a woman is *so* misunderstood.

MATT. It is.

DOLLY. Yes, Lucas had a friendship with a governess here which we all misunderstood — till afterwards.

LUCAS. I say, Dolly, don't you —

RENIE. Now that there is no chance of your misjudging our friendship, I don't mind saying — (*Shows signs of breaking down.*) You won't misunderstand me?

[*Clinging to his hand.*

MATT. No, no!

RENIE. My life has not been altogether a happy one.

MATT. I'm sure it has n't!

RENIE. Under other circumstances — Let that pass! (*Wrings Matt's hand.*) Thank you, thank you! (*Goes to Lucas.*) Captain Wentworth, I shall always be proud to have known you.

DOLLY. I 've told him all that!

[*Matt hushes Dolly with a gesture.*

RENIE. I shall always cherish the memory of our friendship, but it might be misunderstood, and so (*breaking down, but bearing up with an effort*) you will behave like the gallant gentleman I know you to be, and say good-bye to me for ever!

MATT. Nobly spoken! Very nobly spoken indeed!

LUCAS. Well, if you insist —

RENIE. I do! Good-bye for ever!

LUCAS. Good-bye.

[*They have a long hand-shake.*

RENIE. Good-bye.

[*Tears herself away from him and tragically throws herself on sofa. Lucas follows her up.*

LUCAS. I say, Mrs. Sturgess —

RENIE (*face buried in hands, moans out*). Go, go! In pity's name, don't make it harder for me!

MATT. In pity's name, don't make it harder for her!

DOLLY (*looking off at door*). They 'll be coming out of the billiard-room directly.

MATT. Now, Lucas —

[*Criddle appears at door.*

CRIDDLE. Your horse is waiting for you, sir.

LUCAS. My horse?

CRIDDLE. Yes, sir, just outside.

LUCAS. What on earth do they mean? A valuable horse like that — just clipped — standing about on a night like this — who told them?

DOLLY. I did. The horse is waiting to take you back to Aldershot.

LUCAS. I can't go back to Aldershot in this kit. (*Pointing to his dress-clothes.*) Tell them to take it back to the Red Lion!

DOLLY. And, Criddle, give the man Captain Wentworth's portmanteau to take to the Red Lion at the same time.

CRIDDLE. Yes, ma'am.

[*Exit Criddle.*

LUCAS (*grumbling*). Well, of all — Good-bye, Mrs. Sturgess.

DOLLY. You 've said good-bye —

RENIE (*still tragic, on sofa*). Farewell — for ever!

LUCAS. Good-night, Dolly!

DOLLY. Farewell — for a good long time.

[*Shaking hands.*

LUCAS. Good-night, uncle.

MATT. Good-night, Lucas.

[*Shaking hands.*

LUCAS (*turns at door*). Happen to have your cigar-case handy? (*Matt takes out cigar-case, offers it.*) Could you spare two?

MATT. Certainly.

LUCAS. I 've got a jolly long ride; I 'll take three if you don't mind.

MATT. Do!

LUCAS. Thank 'ee. Well, good-night, everybody.

[*Matt gets Lucas off, closes door after him.*

RENIE (*rouses herself from sofa*). Has he gone? Is it all over?

DOLLY. I hope so.

[*Goes and rings bell twice.*

RENIE (*goes to Matt impulsively, and seizes his hand*). At least this bitter experience has gained me one true friend.

MATT (*embarrassed*). Yes—

RENIE (*wrings his hand in gratitude*). Thank you so much—

(*He gets away from her and shows relief; takes out cigar and prepares to light it. Renie standing in the middle of the room, pitying herself.*)

That 's where we get the worst of it, we women who have hearts! We must feel, we must show our feelings, and then we get trampled down in the fight. Oh, Dolly, how I envy you your nature!

DOLLY (*very chilly*). Are you going into the spare room, dear?

RENIE. Anywhere! Anywhere! Yes, the spare room!

[*Peters, Dolly's maid, appears at door.*

DOLLY. Peters, will you bank up the fire in the spare room and make everything comfortable for Mrs. Sturgess?

PETERS. Yes, ma'am.

[*Exit Peters.*

RENIE (*still in the middle of the room, pitying herself*). So my poor little tragedy is ended!

[*To Matt.*

MATT. Yes. Well, let 's be thankful no bones are broken!

RENIE. No bones, but how about hearts? Well, I must bear it. (*With a weary smile.*) Must n't I?

MATT. I 'm afraid you must.

RENIE. Good-night! (*Wrings his hand with gratitude.*) Good-night!

MATT. Good-night.

[*Gets away from her, and busies himself with his cigar; lights it.*

RENIE. Good-night, Dolly!

DOLLY. I'll come up with you, and stay till you're quite comfortable.

RENIE. Shall I ever be comfortable again? Will things ever be the same? I wonder!

[*Goes off mournfully and tragically at back with a prolonged sigh. Matt has seated himself on sofa and taken up paper.*

DOLLY (*calls his attention to Renie's exit and makes a furious gesture after her*). I know she'll be here next Christmas! (*Marches down, enraged, to Matt and repeats in an angry, aggrieved way, emphasizing each word.*) I know that woman will be here next Christmas!

MATT (*seated comfortably with his cigar and paper*). I daresay she will —

[*Dolly marches indignantly and decisively to door and exit.*

CURTAIN

(*Half an hour passes between Acts II and III.*)

ACT III

SCENE. *The same. Discover Matt in the same seat and attitude, with paper and cigar. Dolly enters.*

MATT. Well?

DOLLY. I've had an awful time with her—

MATT. How?

DOLLY (*seated*). First she had another fit of hysterics—then she longed to go out into the night air to cool her fevered brow—then she moaned out something about her noble Lucas—

MATT. And now?

DOLLY. I've persuaded her to let Peters undress her. I've got her off my hands at last.

MATT. That's a comfort.

DOLLY. Dad!

MATT. Yes.

DOLLY. I won't have her here next Christmas.

MATT. No, I would n't.

DOLLY (*repeats in a slow, aggrieved, enraged way, emphasising each syllable*). Whatever happens, I will not have that woman in my house next Christmas. You hear that?

MATT. Yes. You won't have her here next Christmas!

DOLLY. I mean it, this time. And I won't have Lucas here again for a very long time.

MATT. I would n't.

DOLLY (*seated beside him*). Dad, please put away that paper. You're going over to Aldershot to-morrow to try to get Lucas exchanged?

MATT. I'll try.

DOLLY. Where can you get him sent?

MATT. Gibraltar — India — South Africa — according as an appointment happens to be vacant.

DOLLY. The further the better, and the longer. (*Peters appears at door.*) Well, Peters, have you made Mrs. Sturgess comfortable?

PETERS. I 'm trying to, ma'am.

DOLLY. Is she in bed yet?

PETERS. No, ma'am.

DOLLY. Not in bed!

PETERS. No, ma'am, but she seems rather quieter.

DOLLY. She let you undress her, I suppose?

PETERS. I 'm just going to, ma'am. She says her brain is still throbbing.

DOLLY. Throbbing!

PETERS. And could you lend her your hop-pillow?

DOLLY. You 'll find it in my wardrobe.

PETERS. Yes, ma'am.

DOLLY. Peters, pat up the hop-pillow for her, and insist on undressing her —

PETERS. Yes, ma'am.

[*Going.*

DOLLY. Don't leave her till you 've seen her comfortably in bed.

PETERS. No, ma'am.

[*Exit Peters. A gust of wind and a little rattle of hail on the conservatory window.*

MATT. Whew! The New Year means business!

DOLLY. And so do I, as Lucas will find out.

MATT. He is finding it out, on that heath!

DOLLY. Yes! (*With a little laugh.*) Ha! ha! (*A louder gust and rattle of hail.*) Listen! Listen! Ha! And he might have been here playing a comfortable rubber by the fire — if he 'd simply behaved himself!

MATT. If he 'd "simply behaved" himself! What we all miss through not "simply behaving" ourselves!

[*Another gust.*

DOLLY (*laughs*). Ah! He's catching it! I shall insist on Renie driving out with me to-morrow afternoon.

MATT. Yes.

DOLLY. Then she can't meet Lucas. That will be another sell for him — (*Another furious gust and rattle*). Listen! Ha! ha! I wonder how far Lucas has got!

[*A noise of something being knocked over in the conservatory, which is lighted.*

MATT (*goes to the conservatory door, looks in; is startled*). Hillo! hillo! What?

[*Lucas enters from the upper conservatory door in riding-clothes of first act.*

DOLLY (*enraged*). Lucas! (*More enraged.*) Lucas! How dare you?

LUCAS. It's all right — don't make a fuss!

DOLLY (*furious*). Why aren't you on the way to Aldershot?

LUCAS. I didn't like the look of the weather! I didn't like the look of it at all! So I got them to give me a shake-down at the Red Lion —

DOLLY (*indignantly*). Shake-down at the Red Lion!

LUCAS. Yes, on their sofa! You needn't look so black! I asked you first, to let me have a shake-down here — on that sofa —

DOLLY. But why have you come back here?

LUCAS. Well, I must have dropped those cigars Uncle Matt gave me. I put them carefully in my side pocket, and when I got down to the Red Lion, lo and behold, they weren't there!

DOLLY. You could have got a cigar at the Red Lion —

LUCAS (*turns to Matt for sympathy*). I could have got a cigar at the Red Lion! (*To Dolly.*) No, thank you! So I thought I'd just stroll up here in the hope —

DOLLY. In the hope of seeing Mrs. Sturgess! But she's safely in bed this time, and there's no possible chance of your seeing her.

LUCAS. In the hope of getting Harry to give me a decent smoke. Well, I came into the hall and not wishing to rile you by my hated presence — I slipped into the conservatory —

[*Enter Harry.*

HARRY (*surprised at the riding-clothes*). Hillo, Lu, going back to Aldershot to-night?

LUCAS. No, not unless the weather takes a turn. No, Dolly said that as the spare room was occupied, would I mind getting a shake-down at the Red Lion. So I did, and as I 've got nothing to smoke, may I cadge a cigar?

HARRY. Yes, old fellow.

[*Taking out cigar-case.*

DOLLY (*intercepting*). You said I should take charge of your cigars, in case you should be tempted to smoke more than two a day —

HARRY. By Jove, I forgot all about two per diem — I 've been smoking all day. Here, Lu! (*About to throw cigar-case to Lucas.*) You 'd better take the lot and keep me out of temptation!

DOLLY. No! I 'll take charge of that, please.

[*Takes the cigar-case, looks angrily at Lucas, goes to writing-desk, puts it in. Peters appears at door.*

PETERS. I beg pardon, ma'am, Mrs. Sturgess —

DOLLY. What about her?

PETERS. When I got back with the hop-pillow she was n't there. I 've looked all over the house, and I can't find her anywhere. (*Glancing off into the conservatory.*) Oh, there she is!

[*Renie enters, fully dressed, from conservatory, very languidly, with handkerchief and smelling-salts. Peters goes off.*

DOLLY. Renie!

[*Looks at Matt, who is inclined to laugh, checks it, shrugs his shoulders and goes over to fire.*

RENIE. My head was racking; I had to rush out — I 've

been pacing up and down under the veranda, up and down, up and down, up and down — (*Dolly makes a little grimace of angry incredulity.*) It 's a little easier now, so I 'll take advantage of the lull, and try to get some sleep.

DOLLY. Yes, I would.

RENIE. Good-night, dear.

DOLLY (*severely*). Good-night once more.

RENIE. Good-night, Mr. Telfer.

[*Offering hand.*

HARRY. Good-night, I 'm awfully sorry —

RENIE (*with her weary smile*). Oh, it 's only a headache. I can bear it. Thank you for your sympathy. (*Wringing his hand in fervent gratitude.*) Good-night, Mr. Barron.

MATT. Good-night. I hope we shan't have any more little tragedies, eh?

RENIE (*very fervently*). I hope not, oh, I hope not! (*To Lucas very casually and distantly.*) Good-night, Captain Wentworth.

LUCAS (*same tone*). Good-night, Mrs. Sturgess. (*Exit Renie. Peters is seen to join her in the hall. A little pause.*) Well, I 'll be toddling back to the Red Lion. Good-night, Dolly. (*Dolly looks at him, furious, turns away. Harry looks a little surprised.*) Good-night, Harry.

HARRY. Good-night, Lu. Seems a pity for you to turn out on a night like this. Dolly, can't we give him a shake-down —?

DOLLY. No!

[*Harry shows surprise at her tone. A little pause of embarrassment.*

LUCAS. Good-night, Uncle Matt.

MATT (*comes up to him, in a low voice*). Cut it, my dear lad. Cut it! That 's understood?

LUCAS. Yes, of course. Well, good-night, Dolly, once more. (*She does not reply.*) Oh, well, if you 're going

on the rampage — (*Goes off, muttering.*) Infernal nuisance — night like this —

[*Exit Lucas.*

HARRY. Is anything the matter?

DOLLY. Lucas has offended me very much. I don't wish to speak of it.

[*The Professor enters at back.*

MATT. Well, who was the victor?

HARRY. The Professor won all four games.

PROFESSOR. I ascribe the increased accuracy of my stroke at billiards to my increased nerve force, now I have made Pableine my staple article of diet in place of meat.

MATT. Flies to the grey matter, eh?

PROFESSOR. Instantaneously.

MATT. Good stuff!

PROFESSOR. I hope you'll try it. Shall I send a tin to your room?

MATT. Will you? That will be kind!

[*Criddle appears at door.*

CRIDDLE. I've put the spirits in the hall, sir.

HARRY. You can take them away, Criddle. In the future we shall not require spirits at night, only soda water and tea.

CRIDDLE. Yes, sir.

[*Exit Criddle.*

DOLLY (*who has been sitting wearily on sofa, rises*). Well, I'm going to bed.

HARRY. You forget, dear.

DOLLY. What? (*Harry taps the writing-desk.*) Oh, my dear Harry, we won't go into them to-night.

HARRY. Yes, my dear, if you please. (*Very firmly. Dolly makes an impatient gesture and pouts.*) Please don't look like that. If I'm to help you in paying off these bills, it must be to-night or not at all.

DOLLY. Oh, very well, but —

[*Sits down wearily.*

PROFESSOR (*taking out watch*). Five minutes past my usual hour.

DOLLY. Renie has one of her bad headaches, so I've put her in the spare room.

PROFESSOR. Thank you. I'm afraid she's a little wilful. I can never get her to see that life can yield us no real satisfaction unless we regulate all our actions to the most minute point. Good-night.

DOLLY. Good-night.

[*Shaking hands.*

PROFESSOR. Good-night, Telfer.

HARRY. Good-night.

[*Shaking hands.*

MATT. Good-night, Harry.

HARRY. Good-night, Dad.

[*Shaking hands.*

MATT (*to Dolly*). Night-night, dear.

DOLLY. Night-night, Dad.

[*Kissing him.*

PROFESSOR (*has been waiting at door*). I might perhaps show you the precise way of mixing the Pableine.

MATT. That would be kind! What's the dose?

PROFESSOR. Two teaspoonfuls. On certain occasions I have taken as much as four tablespoonfuls.

MATT. Was n't that rather — going it?

PROFESSOR. No. It's quite tasteless, except for a very slight beany flavour.

MATT. Sounds just the thing for a New Year's drink, to brace up good resolutions. Come along! I'll have a regular night-cap of it.

[*Exeunt Matt and Professor.*

HARRY. Now we can have our cosy half-hour.

DOLLY. Ye—es. I've had an awful evening with Lucas. Don't you think —?

HARRY. No, my darling. You put it off after tea —

DOLLY. But our heads will be so much clearer in the morning —

HARRY (*very solemnly and severely*). My darling, remember what Pilcher said about procrastination. And

remember our resolutions last night. If we break them on the first night of the year, where shall we be on the thirty-first of December?

DOLLY. I'm horribly fagged.

HARRY. Conquer it! Think how delightful it will be to put your head on the pillow to-night, without a single anxiety, without a single thought—

DOLLY. Except my gratitude to you!

HARRY. Come, dear, no time like the present!

DOLLY (*jumps up very briskly*). No time like the present! (*Looking at him with great admiration.*) Oh, Harry, what a dear, kind, good husband you've always been to me!

HARRY. Have I, my darling? (*Modestly.*) I've done my best—

DOLLY. How I must have tried you!

HARRY. No, dear—at least a little, sometimes.

DOLLY. When I think what patience you've had with me, and never reproached me—

HARRY. Well, not often. We've had our little tiffs—That day at Goodwood—eh?

DOLLY. Don't speak of it! I was to blame—

HARRY. No, dear, I can't let you accuse yourself. I was quite in the wrong.

DOLLY. No, dear, it was my fault entirely!

HARRY. Well, we won't quarrel about that. Now these bills—

DOLLY. And what good pals we've been!

HARRY. And always shall be.

[*Kissing her.*

DOLLY (*hugging him*). Oh, you dear!

HARRY. Now, business, business!

DOLLY (*going up to writing-desk*). What a lucky woman I am!

HARRY (*seated at table*). Bring them all.

DOLLY (*has opened desk and taken up some bills—she looks round dubiously at Harry*). What a splended

thing it must be to be a husband and have it in your power to make your wife *adore* you, by simply paying a few bills.

HARRY. Yes — bring them all. (*She comes down with a bundle of about fifteen; hands them to him.*) Is this all?

DOLLY. All, of any importance.

HARRY. I want to see them all.

DOLLY. So you shall, but we'll go through these first, because (*lamely*) if you want to ask any questions, we can settle them on the spot, can't we?

HARRY (*reading from the bill*). Maison Récamier, court and artistic millinery. By Jove!

[*Looks up.*

DOLLY. What!

HARRY. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine — nine hats!

DOLLY. Different kinds of hats.

HARRY. Yedda straw hat, four guineas; ostrich feather ruffle, twelve pounds ten —

DOLLY. That was the one — you remember — when I came into the room you said, "Stay there! Just as you are! I must kiss you!"

HARRY. Yes, but twelve pounds ten — Moss green chip hat, four, fourteen, six. Heliotrope velvet toque —

DOLLY. That's the dear little toque you admire so much!

HARRY. Do I? Six guineas! Dear little toque! Hat in white Tegal with plumes of Nattier Bleu — fifteen guineas — Fifteen guineas!

DOLLY. With plumes! Of Nattier Bleu!

HARRY. But fifteen guineas!

DOLLY. Oh, the woman's a fearful swindler! But what are you to do with such people?

HARRY (*with bill*). Total, sixty-four, seven, six. And I get my one silk topper a year, at a guinea, and three and six for doing it up. Total for me, one, four, six. Total for you —

DOLLY. My dear Harry, don't make absurd comparisons!

HARRY (*takes another bill*). John Spearman, artistic gown-maker, ball gowns, reception gowns, race gowns — Good heavens!

DOLLY. What 's the matter?

HARRY. Total, five hundred and fifty-six pounds — that can't be right!

DOLLY (*frightened*). No, it can't be! Add it up!

HARRY (*reading*). Tea gown of chiffon taffeta —

DOLLY. The one I took to Folkestone, you remember?

[*With a little attempt at a kiss.*

HARRY (*gently repulsing her*). No, I don't. (*She puts her arms round his neck; he gently pushes her aside.*) Business first, please. (*Reads.*) Gown of white cloth with Postilion coat of Rose du Barri silk, motifs of silver, forty-five guineas —

DOLLY. You won't grumble at that, for when I first put it on, you stood and looked at me and said, "I want to know how it is, Doll, that the moment a dress gets on to your shoulders, it seems to brisk up, and be as cocky and proud of itself — "

[*Again attempting to embrace him.*

HARRY (*again repulsing her*). Yes, well, now I do know! Jolly proud and cocky your dresses ought to feel at this price! (*Reads.*) "Evening cloak of strawberry satin charmeuse, trimmed silk passementerie, motifs and fringed stoles of dull gold embroidery, thirty-five guineas." What 's a motif?

DOLLY. It 's a trimming — a lot of little touches — a sort of — a — a — a — (*making a little descriptive gesture*) a suggestion — a motif —

HARRY. And Mr. John Spearman's motif is that I should pay him five hundred and fifty-six pounds. Well, I don't like Mr. John Spearman's motifs, and I 'm not going to fall in with them. (*Puts the bill on the table rather angrily, takes up another, reads.*) "Artistic lingerie"! I wonder why all these people call them-

selves artists! "Underwear of daintiness and distinction."

DOLLY. Well, you've always praised—

HARRY. Yes. In future, I'm going to be very careful what articles of your dress I praise. "Three pairs of blue silk garters, forty-five shillings." (*She has settled herself in the arm-chair, looking a little sulky and obstinate, leaning back and pettishly swinging one leg over the other.*) What have you got to say to that?

DOLLY. Garters are necessary.

HARRY. Yes, but why three? And why blue silk? Why don't you speak?

DOLLY. The garters can speak for themselves!

HARRY. Very well. Garters that can speak for themselves can pay for themselves! (*Dashes the bill on the table, takes up another. Reading.*) Three bottles Cœur de Genette — three bottles Soufflé de Marguerite — fifteen pounds for scent — and I have to smoke sixpenny cigars! And sometimes only fourpenny!

DOLLY. Well, if you will smoke those horrid strong things, you can't wonder I have to disinfect the house for you.

HARRY. Disinfect the house *for* me! You'll very soon disinfect the house *of* me! (*Glances through the remaining bills, groans, puts them on the table, and walks about in despair. Dolly rises and is going off.*) Where are you going?

DOLLY. To bed.

HARRY (*stopping her*). No! Now we've begun, we'll go through to the bitter end, if you please. I want you to explain —

DOLLY. My dear Harry, it will be quite useless for me to try to explain in your present state —

HARRY (*getting furious*). In my present state —

DOLLY. Dancing about the room and shouting!

HARRY. I'm not shouting!

DOLLY. You're not shouting?

HARRY. No; and if I am, is n't it enough to make a man shout when his wife —

[*Matt appears at the door in his dressing-gown and slippers.*

MATT. Excuse my interrupting. But you know my room is just above this, and if you could manage to pitch your voices in rather a softer key —

HARRY. By Jove, I 'd forgotten! We were getting a little noisy. I 'm awfully sorry.

MATT. Don't mention it! The Professor gave me rather a stiff go of his Pableine, and I fancy it has n't agreed with me (*tapping his chest*), for I can't get a wink of sleep. Is there a spoonful of whiskey about?

HARRY. On the sideboard in the dining-room.

MATT. Thankee. (*Tapping his chest.*) Harry, when you get over fifty, don't change your night-cap, or any of your other bad habits.

HARRY. I won't. Now, Dolly —

MATT (*anxiously*). You won't perhaps be very long now?

DOLLY. No, we 'd nearly finished —

MATT. Nothing serious, I hope?

DOLLY. Harry does n't approve of my using scent.

HARRY. Not in pailfuls. Certainly not.

DOLLY. I had three small bottles —

MATT. Montaigne says that the sweetest perfume a woman can have, is to have none at all.

[*Exit Matt.*

HARRY. Now, my darling, we shall best arrive at an understanding if we avoid all temper, and discuss it in a calm, business-like way.

DOLLY (*a little frightened*). Ye—es —

HARRY. Very well, then, bring up your chair, and let us go into it, figure by figure, item by item, and see how we stand.

DOLLY. Ye—es. (*Bringing a chair a little way.*) Harry, you aren't going to be as business-like as all that?

HARRY. As all what?

DOLLY. I can't discuss it while you keep me at a distance! (*Suddenly rushes at him, seats herself on his knee, puts his arm round her waist, kisses him.*) There! now I feel I can discuss it thoroughly.

HARRY. Very well (*kisses her*), so long as we do discuss it thoroughly.

DOLLY. I began to get quite frightened of you, Mr. Jobling.

HARRY. Jobling?

DOLLY. The man Mr. Pilcher had to get a money-box for, because he swore at his wife!

HARRY. Oh, yes.

DOLLY. You got so angry — and shouted —

HARRY. Well, there was no reason for that, especially as getting out of temper is *the* one thing I'm quite resolved to conquer this New Year —

DOLLY (*kissing him*). Don't forget that!

HARRY (*kisses her*). Now, business, business! (*Takes up a bill.*) What have we here? Carchet, gantier et bonnetier, artiste — Hillo, here's another artist! In stockings this time. (*Suddenly.*) I say!

DOLLY (*frightened*). Eh?

HARRY (*points to an item in bill*). Come now, Dolly — this is really too bad — this really is too bad!

DOLLY (*frightened*). What?

[*Getting off his knee.*

HARRY. One dozen pairs best silk hose, with clocks —

DOLLY. Yes — how much does that come to?

HARRY. Eleven pounds two —

DOLLY. It does seem rather a high price, but —

[*Drawing up her dress and showing an inch or two of silk stocking.*

HARRY. You're wearing them about the house?

DOLLY. I can't go about the house without stockings. And I put them on for your especial benefit. (*He utters a contemptuous exclamation.*) They're a lovely quality —

[*Drawing up her dress an inch or two higher.*

HARRY. I daresay. (*Turning away.*) I'm not going to admire your stockings, or your ostrich ruffles, or your blue silk garters, or your motifs, or anything that is yours! It's too expensive!

DOLLY (*dress an inch higher, looking down at her stockings*). It's the clocks you have to pay for —

HARRY. I beg your pardon, it's the clocks I haven't got to pay for! And don't mean to — if I can help it. Idiotic thing to go and put clocks on stockings — (*muttering*) damned silly idiotic —

DOLLY. Ah! (*Goes to table, brings the hospital box and puts it in front of him.*) Double fine this time.

HARRY. What for?

DOLLY. Naughty swear word, and getting out of temper.

HARRY. Oh, well — (*fumbling in his pocket*) I did say d——, but I did n't get out of temper!

DOLLY. You did n't get out of temper?

HARRY. Not at all. I'm quite calm. (*Sulkily puts a shilling in the box.*) There! (*Seats himself at table.*) Now we'll go quietly and methodically through the remainder — (*Taking up a bill, looks at it, exclaims.*) Good heavens!

DOLLY. Good heavens what?

HARRY (*in a low, exhausted tone, with groans*). Good heavens! Good heavens! It's absolutely useless — Good heavens!

DOLLY (*coming up, looking over*). But what is it?

HARRY (*points to bill*). Four more hats! Nine on the other bill — four more here. Thirteen hats.

DOLLY. No, one was a toque.

HARRY. But can you explain?

DOLLY. Yes. You said yourself that Madame Récamier was horribly expensive, so I left her and went to Jacquelin's — just to save your pocket —

HARRY. Never save my pocket again, please.

DOLLY. Very well, I won't.

HARRY. No, I daresay you won't, but I shall! I shall

draw the strings very tightly in future. Save my pocket! (*He is walking about distractedly.*) Save my pocket!

[*Groans.*

DOLLY. Now, Harry, it's useless to take it in this way; you knew when you married me I had n't got the money sense —

HARRY (*groans*). I had n't got any sense at all!

DOLLY. Very likely not. But try and have a little now. What have I done? Run a little into debt, solely to please you.

HARRY. Yes; well, now run out of it, and I shall be better pleased still.

DOLLY. After all, running into debt is a positive virtue beside the things that some wives do!

HARRY. Oh, it's a positive virtue, is it?

DOLLY. A husband is very lucky when his wife spends most of her time running up a few bills. It keeps her out of mischief. I'm sure you ought to feel very glad that I'm a little extravagant!

HARRY. Oh, I am! I am! I'm delighted!

[*He sits at table, takes out a pencil, hurriedly puts down the amounts of the various bills. She creeps up behind him.*

DOLLY. What are you doing?

HARRY. I'm totting up to see how lucky I am! Forty-one, one, six — (*Groans.*) Ninety-four —

[*Groans.*

DOLLY (*has crept up behind him, puts her arms round his neck*). Now, Harry, will you take my advice —?

HARRY. No.

DOLLY. It's past eleven.

[*Trying to take the pencil out of his hand.*

HARRY (*disengaging her arms, speaking very sternly*). Will you have the goodness to let me have all your bills, so that I may know what help I shall need from my banker?

DOLLY. Harry, you don't mean that? Oh, that 's absurd with our income!

HARRY. Will you have the goodness to do as I say, and at once, please? (*He is jotting down figures. She stands still in the middle of the room.*) Did you hear me?

[*She bursts into tears. He turns round and shows symptoms of relenting towards her, but steels himself and turns to the bills. She bursts into renewed tears. He goes on figuring.*

DOLLY (*piteously*). Harry! Harry! (*Goes up to him and plucks his sleeve.*) Harry!

HARRY. Well?

[*He turns and looks at her, is about to yield, but resists, turns away from her, settles resolutely to his figures.*

DOLLY. And on the first night of the New Year, too! Just as we were going to be so happy! Harry! (*Holds out her arms appealingly.*) Harry! (*Harry suddenly turns round and clasps her.*) How could you be so unkind to me?

HARRY. Was I? I did n't mean to be. Now! Dry your tears, and help me reckon this up —

DOLLY. Ye—es.

HARRY. But, first of all, let me have the remainder of the bills —

DOLLY. Yes.

HARRY. At once, my darling — it 's getting late.

DOLLY. Yes. (*Goes up to desk.*) You won't reproach me?

HARRY. Of course I won't.

DOLLY. I can bear anything except your reproaches. Promise you won't reproach me.

HARRY. I won't, unless —

DOLLY. Unless what?

HARRY. It 's something too awful.

DOLLY. Oh, it is n't. Not at all. Not at all. (*Goes up to the desk, brings down about ten more bills, with*

great affected cheerfulness.) There! You see, it's nothing.

HARRY (*hastily looking at the totals*). Nothing? You call these nothing?

DOLLY. Nothing to speak about — nothing awful?

HARRY. Good heavens! How any woman with the least care for her husband, or her home — (*looking at one total after another*). How any woman with the least self-respect — (*Dolly goes to him, puts her arms round him, tries to embrace him — he repulses her.*) No, please. I've had enough of that old dodge.

DOLLY. Dodge!

HARRY. I remember that last two hundred pounds and how you sweedled me out of it!

DOLLY. Sweedled?

HARRY. Yes! Sweedled!

DOLLY. There's no such word!

HARRY. No, but there's the thing! As most husbands know. (*Referring to one bill after another, picking out items.*) Lace coat, hand-made! *En-tout-cas*, studded cabochons of lapis lazuli — studded cabochons — studded cabochons!

DOLLY (*has quietly seated herself, and is looking at the ceiling*). Could n't you manage to pitch your voice in rather a softer key?

HARRY (*comes angrily down to her, bills in hand, speaks in a whisper, very rapidly and fiercely.*) Yes! And I say that a woman who goes and runs up bills like these (*dashing the back of one hand against the bills in the other*), while her husband is smoking threepenny cigars, will very soon bring herself and him to one of those new palatial workhouses where, thank heaven, the cuisine and appointments are now organized with a view of providing persons of your tastes with every luxury at the ratepayers' expense. (*Returns angrily to the bills, turns them over.*) Irish lace bolero! (*Turns to another.*) Fur motor coat, fifty-five guineas —

DOLLY (*calmly gazing at the ceiling*). You told me to look as smart as Mrs. Colefield.

HARRY. Not at that price! If I'd known what that motor tour would cost, by Jove! I'd—

DOLLY. You're getting noisy again. You'll wake my father.

HARRY. He ought to be waked! He ought to know what his daughter is saddling me with.

DOLLY. Very well, if you don't care how shabby I look—

HARRY. Shabby! (*Referring to bills.*) Lace demi-toilette! Point de Venise lace Directoire coat! Shabby?

DOLLY. My dear Harry, do you suppose we shall ever agree as to what constitutes shabbiness?

HARRY. No, I'm hanged if we ever shall!

DOLLY. Then suppose we drop the subject. For the future I shall endeavour to please you entirely.

HARRY. Oh, you will?

DOLLY. By dressing so that you'll be ashamed to be seen in the same street with me. I shall make myself a perfect fright—a perfect dowdy—a perfect draggle-tail!

HARRY. Then I shall not be seen in the same street with you.

DOLLY. You won't?

HARRY. No, my dear. Make no mistake about that!

DOLLY. You'll be seen with somebody else, perhaps?

HARRY. Very likely.

DOLLY. Have you met Miss Smithson again?

HARRY. Not since the last time.

DOLLY. Have you seen her since we were at Folkestone?

HARRY. What's that to do with your bills?

DOLLY. A great deal. That night at dinner she told you her dress allowance was a hundred and twenty a year, and you said you wished she'd give me a few lessons in economy.

HARRY. I did not.

DOLLY. Pardon me, you did!

HARRY. Pardon me, I did not. I said she might give *some* women *a* lesson in economy.

DOLLY. You did not! I heard every word of your conversation, and you distinctly asked her to give me, your wife, a few lessons in economy.

HARRY. I'll swear I did n't!

DOLLY. Ask my father! He was there.

HARRY. Very well! I'll ask him the first thing in the morning.

DOLLY. No, to-night! You 've accused me of deliberately saying what is n't true, and I —

HARRY. I have not!

DOLLY. Yes, you have. And I insist on having it cleared up to-night! I don't suppose he 's asleep! Fetch him down!

HARRY. Very well! I will fetch him down!

[*Exit Harry.*

DOLLY (*paces furiously up and down*). Me! Lessons in economy! Lessons in economy! Me! Lessons in economy!

[*Re-enter Harry.*

HARRY. He 'll be down in a minute! Meantime (*very angry*) I want to know what any woman in this world wants with two dozen cache corsets?

[*Banging his free hand on the bills.*

DOLLY. We 'll clear up Miss Smithson first —

HARRY. No, we will not clear up Miss Smithson —

DOLLY. Because you can't clear up Miss Smithson —

HARRY. I can clear up Miss Smithson —

DOLLY. You cannot clear up Miss Smithson —

(*Matt appears at door in dressing-room, rubbing his eyes and looking very sleepy.*)

Dad, you remember Miss Smithson —

MATT (*coming in, very sleepy*). Smithson?

DOLLY. The girl at the hotel at Folkestone, that Harry paid so much attention to.

HARRY. I paid no more attention to Miss Smithson than was absolutely necessary. Did I, Mr. Barron?

DOLLY. Oh! Oh! Dad, you remember—

MATT. Not for the moment—

DOLLY. Not the disgraceful way Harry—there's no other word—carried on!

HARRY. I did not carry on—Mr. Barron, I appeal to you.

DOLLY. Dad!

MATT. My dear, I certainly did not notice—

DOLLY. No, he was far too careful to let any one notice it, except his own wife!

HARRY. You lay your life when I do carry on, my wife will be the last person I shall allow to notice it!

DOLLY. I daresay! Dad, did you hear that?

MATT. Yes. (*Rousing himself a little.*) Now, Harry, what about this Miss Smithson?

HARRY. That's what I want to know!

MATT. Who is Miss Smithson?

DOLLY. Surely you remember that lanky girl—

HARRY. Miss Smithson is not lanky—

DOLLY. Not lanky? Not lanky? You can't have any eyes—!

HARRY. That's what I've often thought—

DOLLY (*explodes*). Oh! Oh! Dad!

MATT. Come, Harry, let's clear this up. (*Suddenly.*) Smithson? Oh, yes! The girl who sat on your left at your dinner-party—

DOLLY. That's the one!

MATT. I should call her a trifle lanky, Harry.

DOLLY. A trifle? Well, never mind! You remember that dinner-party—

MATT (*cautiously*). Ye—es.

DOLLY. You remember how she waited for a lull in the talk, and then she said with that silly, simpering, appealing look—

HARRY. Miss Smithson's look is not silly or simpering.

DOLLY. Well, it 's appealing, is n't it?

HARRY (*with a little chuckle*). Oh, yes, it 's appealing.

DOLLY (*enraged*). Oh! Dad!

MATT (*quiets her*). Sh! — What did she say?

DOLLY. She said, with a very marked glance at me, "My dress allowance is a hundred and twenty a year, and I don't understand how any reasonable woman can wish for more!" What do you think of that?

MATT. Well, if she did say that, and if she glanced at you, it —

DOLLY. Yes?

MATT. It was n't very nice of her.

DOLLY. Nice? It was an insult! A direct, intentional, abominable insult, was n't it?

MATT. Yes, yes, decidedly, under the circumstances —

DOLLY. And Harry ought to have resented it?

MATT. At his own dinner-table he could n't, could he?

DOLLY. Yes! At least, if he could n't resent it, he ought to have *shown* that he resented it. Instead of that, he actually asked her to give me a few lessons in economy!

HARRY. I did not!

DOLLY. Pardon me, you did! Me! his wife! Lessons in economy!

HARRY. And a thundering good thing if she had given you a few before you ran up these bills!

[*Dashes his hand on to the bills.*

DOLLY. There! You hear!

MATT. Come, Harry, you ought n't to have asked another woman to give your wife lessons in economy.

HARRY. I did n't!

DOLLY. Dad! You were there —

MATT. Yes, but I don't quite remember —

DOLLY. You don't remember? Surely you can remember a simple thing like that when your own daughter tells you it was so!

MATT. Now, Harry, what did you really say to Miss Smithson?

HARRY. I said she might give *some* women a lesson in economy.

MATT. Not meaning Dolly?

[*Giving him a wink to say no.*

HARRY. No—o.

DOLLY. Then whom did he mean? Lessons in economy? Whom *could* he mean if he did n't mean me?

HARRY. Just so!

DOLLY. Ah! There! You see, he owns it!

MATT. No, no, I 'm sure he does n't mean it! Did you, Harry?

[*Winking at Harry.*

DOLLY. Then will he please say what he really does mean?

MATT. Now, Harry, what do you really mean?

HARRY. Well, you remember that night of the dinner-party at Folkestone.

MATT (*cautiously*). Ye—es.

HARRY. After they 'd all gone, you and I went into the smoking-room, did n't we?

MATT (*cautiously*). Ye—es.

HARRY. And you said, "Doll 's in one of her high gales again!"

DOLLY. High gales! (*Indignant.*) Father! You did n't say that?

MATT. No, no, my dear —

HARRY. Excuse me, those were your exact words. High gales!

MATT. I don't remember.

DOLLY. No, you don't remember anything.

HARRY. You said, "What on earth was up between her and Miss Smithson at dinner?"

DOLLY. You see! That proves exactly what I said!

HARRY. No, by Jove, it proves that your father noticed what a confounded, cussed —

DOLLY. Go on! Go on! Say it!

MATT. Shush! Shush! Well, Harry, what did you say?

HARRY. Well, not wishing to give Dolly away —

DOLLY. Ha! ha! Not wishing to give me away!

HARRY. Not then! But, by Jove, if any decent chap were to come along now —

DOLLY (*exploding*). There! There! (*To Matt.*) And you sit there and hear my own husband insult me in my own house!

MATT. No! No!

DOLLY. But there you sit! There you sit!

MATT (*jumps up fiercely*). Now, Harry!

HARRY (*fiercely*). Well, now, Mr. Barron —

DOLLY. Why don't you defend me? Why don't you demand an apology?

MATT. What for?

DOLLY. For everything! For to-night! For that night at Folkestone!

HARRY. That night at Folkestone! Why, your father was quite on my side —

MATT. What?

DOLLY. He was n't; were you, Dad?

MATT. No — no.

HARRY. What? (*Fiercely.*) Do you remember exactly what passed between us in the smoking-room, Mr. Barron?

MATT. No.

HARRY. Then I 'll tell you —

MATT (*retreating towards door*). No — no — I don't want to know —

HARRY (*following him up, shouting a little*). You said, "I know what she 's like in her high gales! I remember what the little devil was like at home."

DOLLY (*pursuing him up to door*). Father! You did n't say that!

MATT. No — no, my darling — quite a mistake — quite a mistake — altogether a mistake.

[*Gets thankfully off at back.*

DOLLY (*calls after him*). Then why don't you stay and tell him so!

HARRY (*shouts after Matt*). It's not a mistake!

DOLLY (*calls after Matt*). It's cowardly of you to leave me here to be insulted.

HARRY (*goes up to door, shouts*). It's not a mistake! You patted me on the back and said, "Poor chap! Poor chap!" You know you did! (*Closes the door, comes fiercely down to Dolly.*) It's not a mistake! He could see you had insulted Miss Smithson.

DOLLY. I had not insulted her! I was far too civil to her, considering that the next evening you took her out on the Leas, when you ought to have been at billiards —

HARRY. I took her out on the Leas!

DOLLY. Yes! You weren't in the billiard-room! So where were you? Where were you?

HARRY. I jolly well don't know, and I — I —

DOLLY. Say it! Say it!

HARRY. I damned well don't care!

DOLLY. Ah!

[*She seizes the box, brings it up to him, puts it irritatingly in front of him; he seizes it, they struggle for it, trying to take it out of each other's hands; she screams, he tries to get it; there is a scuffle round the room; he tries to rub her knuckles, she makes a little feint to bite him; in the struggle the box drops on the floor a little below the table, right.*

DOLLY. Jobling! Jobling! Jobling!

HARRY. Now, madam, for the last time, have I all your bills?

DOLLY. Jobling! Jobling! Jobling!

HARRY. Have I all your bills?

DOLLY. Jobling! Jobling! Jobling!

HARRY. Once more, madam, have I all your bills?

DOLLY. No, you haven't!

HARRY. Then please hand them over to me this instant, so that I may take proceedings.

DOLLY (*laughing*). Proceedings! Ha! Take your proceedings!

HARRY. By Jove! I will take proceedings.

DOLLY. Take them! Take them!

HARRY (*walking about furiously with the bills*). So this is the way the money goes! (*Banging the bills.*) While I have to smoke twopenny cigars! And can't get a decent dinner!

DOLLY. You can't get a decent dinner?

HARRY. No! Look at those messes last night. They weren't fit for a cook-shop.

DOLLY. Oh! Oh! Oh! Get a housekeeper! Get a housekeeper!

HARRY. By Jove! that's what I mean to do!

DOLLY. Have Miss Smithson! Send for her to-morrow morning! I'll hand her over the keys!

HARRY (*shouting*). And please hand me over the rest of your bills! The rest of your bills, madam!

[*Dolly marches up to the desk.*

[*Matt appears at door in dressing-gown.*

MATT. I can't get a wink of sleep —

[*Dolly takes out about twenty more bills.*

HARRY. I insist on seeing the whole lot! So there!

DOLLY (*flourishing the bills, strewing them on the floor*). Well, there! And there! And there! And there! Now you've got the whole lot! And I hope you're satisfied. I'm going into Renie's room!

[*Exit Dolly.*

HARRY. I insist on your going through these bills —

[*Following her off. Their voices are heard retreating upstairs, Dolly saying, "Go through the bills! Send for Miss Smithson! Have her here to-morrow morning! Take your proceedings"; Harry saying, "I insist on going through the bills to-night! Do you hear, madam, I insist! Will you come down and go through these bills," etc.*

MATT (*listens, as their voices die away. When the voices*

have ceased, he surveys the scene). We're making a splendid start for the New Year!

[*Sees the box on the floor, picks it up, carefully places it on table, and goes off.*

CURTAIN

(*A year passes between Acts III and IV.*)

ACT IV

SCENE. *The same. Time, afternoon of January 1, 1908.*

Enter Lucas, followed by Criddle. Lucas has his left collar-bone broken, and his arm is strapped across his breast; his coat is buttoned loosely over the arm, the left sleeve hanging down.

LUCAS. They 've gone to meet me?

CRIDDLE. Yes, sir.

LUCAS. By the road?

CRIDDLE. Yes, sir.

LUCAS. That 's how I 've missed them. My car broke down the other side of the clump, and so I walked over the fields.

CRIDDLE. Yes, sir. I beg pardon, I hope the arm is n't serious.

LUCAS. No, Criddle. Just serious enough to get me a couple of months' leave, so that I could spend the New Year in England.

CRIDDLE. You had it very hot in India, I suppose, sir?

LUCAS. Blazing.

CRIDDLE. We 've got the same old weather here, you see, sir.

LUCAS. Same old weather! Had any visitors for Christmas, Criddle?

CRIDDLE. Mr. Barron, of course, and Professor and Mrs. Sturgess.

LUCAS. Same old visitors — same visitors, I should say. Mr. Pilcher still vicar here, I suppose?

CRIDDLE. Yes, sir. He gave us a wonderful sermon at the old year's service last night.

LUCAS. Same old sermon!

CRIDDLE. No, sir. Not exactly the same sermon, though it had similar points to last year. Ah! You came over for the old year's service last year?

LUCAS. Yes, and a rattling good sermon it was!

CRIDDLE. Very powerful and persuading, was n't it, sir? It even touched me up a bit.

LUCAS. In what way, Criddle?

CRIDDLE. I used to have my ten bob on any horse as I fancied, but I never put a farthing on anything — not even on Sulky Susan for the Oaks.

LUCAS. You did n't?

CRIDDLE. No, and thank God, in a manner of speaking, that I did n't, for she never pulled it off. I owe that to Mr. Pilcher. No, I never touched a thing till the Leger. That reminds me —

LUCAS. What, Criddle?

CRIDDLE. Why, last year, after Mr. Pilcher's sermon, the master had a collecting-box, and when he found himself going a bit off the straight he used to put in a shilling or half-a-crown for Mr. Pilcher's blanket fund —

LUCAS. Yes, of course! And Uncle Matt promised him a sovereign for each of us if we had carried out our good resolutions. Is that coming off, Criddle?

CRIDDLE. I expect it is, sir. Mr. Pilcher is coming here this afternoon, and the master told me to be sure and find the box before he gets here.

LUCAS. Find the box?

CRIDDLE. Nobody has seen anything of it for some months. Excuse me, sir, I must look for it.

[*Exit Criddle.*

[*Lucas takes out letter from an unsealed envelope, glances through it, sits at table, takes out pencil, adds a short note, puts letter in envelope, seals it up, puts it in his tail pocket, goes to conservatory, looks in. Renie enters at door behind him. She starts as he turns round.*

RENIE (*in a whisper*). You 're here already?

LUCAS. Yes —

RENIE. Your wound?

LUCAS. Much better. Nearly well.

RENIE. I 'm so glad —

LUCAS. I 'm not. I shall have to cut it back to India directly. Why did n't you answer my last letter?

RENIE. I did — and tore it up.

LUCAS. Tore it up?

RENIE. What 's the use? I told you last year we could never be anything to each other!

LUCAS. But you did n't mean it?

[*He seizes her hand and kisses it several times.*

RENIE (*feebly attempting to withdraw it*). Yes — yes, I did. Hush!

LUCAS. I want you to read this.

[*Shows her the letter.*

MATT (*heard through the door, which is open a few inches*). Have you found the box, Criddle?

CRIDDLE. No, sir. I 've hunted everywhere.

MATT. Have another look. We must have it ready for Mr. Pilcher.

(*Matt enters. Meantime Renie has crept to upper conservatory door and gone off, signing to Lucas to keep silence. He has taken the letter out of his pocket and held it up for her to see, putting it back before Matt enters.*)

Ah, Lucas. So you 've got here? Happy New Year!

LUCAS. Happy New Year, Uncle Matt.

[*Cordially shaking hands.*

MATT. Glad to see you back in England.

LUCAS. Glad to be back!

MATT. How 's the arm?

LUCAS. Splendid — nearly well. Dolly and Harry all right?

MATT. First rate. They 'll be here directly.

LUCAS. The Sturgesses are here again, Criddle tells me.

MATT. Ye—es.

LUCAS. Grey matter still going strong?

MATT. Booming.

LUCAS. How's Mrs. Sturgess?

MATT. As usual, a little inclined to flop about and play-act—

LUCAS. Yes. Jolly good-looking woman though, eh?

MATT. Very. Lucas—

LUCAS. Well?

MATT. You're quite cured, eh?

LUCAS. Cured?

MATT. Of your infatuation for her.

LUCAS. Infatuation? Well, I admired her, and perhaps it was lucky I was ordered out to India—

MATT. I managed that for you, my boy.

LUCAS. You did?

MATT. Sir John wanted a smart A.D.C., so I drove over to Aldershot, urged your claims, and got you the appointment.

LUCAS. So that was why I was packed off. It was you who—

MATT. Aren't you thankful I did?

LUCAS. Yes, much obliged to you, much obliged!

MATT. So you ought to be. And so's the lady.

LUCAS. Is she?

MATT. Yes. When we got your wire yesterday saying you'd motor down to-day, Dolly had a long talk with her, and the result was she thanked Dolly and me for getting you out of the way and saving her from you.

LUCAS. Did she?

MATT. Yes, for twenty minutes. She kissed Dolly, and I think she would have kissed me, only I didn't feel myself quite worthy.

LUCAS. Oh, so that's all settled!

MATT. That's all settled. At least, let's hope so.

LUCAS. What do you mean?

MATT. Well, you won't come —

LUCAS. What?

MATT. The same old game.

LUCAS. What same old game?

MATT. Why, *the* same old game!

LUCAS. You must be judging me by yourself, when you were young.

MATT. My dear boy, that's just what I am doing. Lucas, there's not going to be any repetition —

LUCAS. No — no.

MATT. Because it is n't the right thing to do, is it?

LUCAS. No.

MATT. Very well then, don't do it!

LUCAS. I won't! (*Listening.*) Ah! (*Dolly's and Harry's voices heard in hall.*) Dolly and Harry! (*Dolly and Harry enter very lovingly.*) Hillo, Doll, old girl! Happy New Year!

DOLLY. Happy New Year, Lu!

LUCAS. Harry, old brick, how goes it?

HARRY. Splendid!

LUCAS. Happy New Year!

HARRY. Happy New Year! (*Looking lovingly at Dolly.*) By Jove, Doll, you can foot it. (*To Lucas.*) Doll and I have just raced up from the farm. She licked me! bless her!

DOLLY. Yes, because you encouraged me!

HARRY (*looking at her lovingly and admiringly, kisses her heartily*). There aren't many things this little woman can't do.

DOLLY. When you encourage me!

HARRY. Oh, I'll encourage you! (*He again kisses her heartily.*) Well, Lu, old boy, glad to see you home again. Arm pretty bad?

LUCAS. No, nearly well, unfortunately.

DOLLY. Down for the day?

LUCAS. Well, now my car has broken down, I was wondering if you 'd put me up —

DOLLY (*firmly*). No. We shall be pleased for you to stay to dinner.

HARRY. There's the spare room, Doll.

DOLLY (*firmly*). No. That may be wanted for Renie or myself.

HARRY (*half aside to her*). I say, not for you, old girl!

LUCAS. Oh, well, I shall have to get a shake-down at the Red Lion.

[*Enter Renie at back, still in outdoor clothes.*

RENIE (*feigning a little surprise*). Captain Wentworth! A happy New Year!

LUCAS. Happy New Year, Mrs. Sturgess.

[*Shaking hands.*

RENIE. So sorry to hear of your wound!

LUCAS. Oh, it's healed, thank you.

RENIE. I'm so glad. Shall you be making a long stay in England?

LUCAS. I fear only a few days longer.

RENIE. I'm sorry your visit will be so short.

[*Criddle enters triumphantly with the hospital-box, which is very mouldy and dusty — he has also a duster in his hand.*

CRIDDLE. I've found him, sir —

MATT. Rather mouldy, eh?

CRIDDLE. Oh, we'll soon put that to rights, sir.

[*Begins to dust the box carefully.*

MATT. Looks well for your household discipline here, Harry.

HARRY. How?

MATT. You've had no occasion to use him lately.

CRIDDLE (*displaying the box, having carefully dusted it*). There he is, sir, Hospital for Incurables! Nearly as good as new.

MATT. Where did you find him?

CRIDDLE. In the wine-cellar, of all places! I was getting out a bottle of the sixty-eight port for New Year's night, and happening to put my hand behind, there he was!

HARRY (*with a sudden gesture of remembrance*). Yes, I remember!

MATT. What should incurables be doing in the wine-cellar? (*Holds out his hand to Criddle for the box. Criddle, who has been holding it carefully, gives it to Matt. Exit Criddle. Matt gives the box a shake. It rattles as if half full of coins. He shakes it again, more violently; it rattles again.*) Internal organs sound healthy. How did he get into the wine-cellar, Harry?

HARRY. Well, Dolly and I had been having a little tiff one morning — nothing serious —

MATT. No. When was that?

HARRY. March, was n't it?

DOLLY. May, I think —

HARRY. No, it was n't that one — Well, never mind, I got so riled at Dolly always poking this box in front of me whenever I happened to — so I thought the wine-cellar would be the safest place for it.

MATT (*gives it another rattle*). Well, here he is, turned up just at the right moment! And here you all are — Dolly, Harry, Lucas, Mrs. Sturgess — all clamouring for me to redeem my promise and put in a sovereign for each of you.

[*Criddle appears at door, announcing Mr. Pilcher. Pilcher enters with four oblong brown-paper parcels of equal size. Exit Criddle.*

PILCHER. Happy New Year to you all! Excuse me. (*Depositing his parcels.*) My New Year's gifts to a few of my parishoners!

DOLLY. New Year's gifts!

PILCHER. To those who need them. (*Shaking hands with her.*) Happy New Year, Mr. Barron!

[*Shaking hands.*

MATT. Happy New Year!

PILCHER. How do this morning, Telfer! (*Harry nods.*) My dear Mrs. Sturgess!

[*Shaking hands.*

RENIE. Happy New Year! What a lovely sermon you gave us again last night!

PILCHER. Lovely! Well, say healthy, bracing.

HARRY. A jolly good rouser again. Made me feel — well —

[*Gives himself a shake.*

PILCHER. Ah, Captain Wentworth, happy New Year!

LUCAS (*shaking hands*). Happy New Year!

PILCHER. I heard you were wounded —

LUCAS. Oh, that's done with.

MATT. We were just talking about our New Year's inquest —

PILCHER. Inquest?

MATT. Into the characters of Dolly and Harry and —

[*Glancing at Renie and Lucas.*

DOLLY. Oh, please don't talk about inquests. Nobody's character is dead here.

MATT. I hope not! We shall see —

LUCAS. Uncle, you don't really mean —

MATT. It was a bona-fide bargain on my side; but if you wish to avoid any awkward little exposures, or if Mr. Pilcher will kindly waive his claims to my contributions —

PILCHER. I'm afraid I can't. I have come here for the express purpose of bearing away my trophy — Ah! (*Seeing box on table, takes it, gives it a shake; his features assume a pleasant smile.*) It seems to have proved a very wholesome household regulator.

HARRY. Yes, by Jove! It had n't been in the house twenty-four hours before I put in a sovereign.

PILCHER. A sovereign?

HARRY. The first night of last year Dolly and I had a little tiff — nothing serious — and so the next morning I made it up and — did n't I, Dolly? —

DOLLY. You did! And paid my bills like a lamb, you dear!

PILCHER. And put in a sovereign? (*Rattles the box*

again.) I won't say, "Don't have any more household tiffs," but I will say, "Don't omit to liquidate them." (*Gives the box another rattle.*) The box must have been in pretty constant use since —

HARRY. Ye—es.

[*Professor Sturgess enters at back, with the proofs of his book in his hand.*

PROFESSOR. How do you do?

PILCHER (*has put down box*). How do you do? (*Shaking hands.*) Happy New Year!

PROFESSOR. Happy New Year to you! (*To Lucas.*) How d' ye do?

LUCAS. First-rate. Happy New Year!

[*Shaking hands.*

PROFESSOR. Thank you. An accident?

LUCAS. Bit of one. Getting over it.

PROFESSOR. If I might recommend the constant use of Pableine.

LUCAS. Oh, thanks, it 's quite well —

PROFESSOR. Try Pableine. It 's a wonderful restorative. I 'm intruding —

[*Looking round.*

PILCHER. Not at all. We were just about to settle the question Mr. Barron raised last New Year's day —

PROFESSOR. Oh, yes; I remember! Curiously enough I have only this morning received the poofs of my new volume, "Free Will, the Illusion."

[*Showing the proofs to Pilcher.*

PILCHER. Very interesting. I should like to discuss the matter with you, but (*taking out watch*) I have so many New Year's calls to make. (*Looking at Matt.*) Perhaps we ought to get on with the — a —

MATT. Inquest.

PILCHER. Vindication.

MATT (*accepting the correction*). Vindication.

PROFESSOR. I may perhaps be allowed to point out that Mr. Barron's novel and humorous experiment can in

no sense be said to settle, or even to touch, the question of Free Will, which as I have proved here depends upon —

[*Again offering the proof.*

PILCHER. I should like to look through those sheets, but —

[*Glancing at Matt.*

PROFESSOR. You shall! I have put the whole argument into the concrete case of Sarah Mumford —

PILCHER. Sarah Mumford?

PROFESSOR. The baby farmer —

MATT. Sarah's grey matter gone watery?

PROFESSOR. Not watery, but she had a yellow effusion —

MATT. I suppose that 's just as bad?

PROFESSOR. Quite.

MATT. What did they do with her?

PROFESSOR. They hanged her. They then discovered extensive lesions and this yellow effusion —

MATT. Pity they did n't discover that before they hanged her.

PROFESSOR. My exact point! Where is the justice of punishing a woman whose grey matter functions perversely? It is nothing short of a crime.

DOLLY. But she had suffocated five dear little babies!

MATT. How could she avoid suffocating babies if she had a yellow effusion in her brain?

PROFESSOR. Precisely my argument — (*Puts his proofs into Matt's hands. Points out a passage. Matt, a little embarrassed, takes them, looks through them.*) The point I wish to establish is this. While we all allow that extensive or recognizable diseases of, or injuries to, the brain, free a man from responsibility and punishment, how can we logically mete out blame or praise, punishment or reward, to our ordinary acts, thoughts, and impulses, seeing that all our acts, thoughts, and impulses, good or bad, virtuous or criminal, are equally the mere expressions of certain inevitable physical

changes in the brain, the mere register on the dial plate of consciousness of necessary predetermined complications in the working of certain atoms of the grey matter of our cortex?

MATT. Quite so! Quite so! (*Dolly is about to speak, but Matt hushes her down with a warning look and sign.*) The Professor wants to say with Socrates that no man would be such a fool as to do wrong, if he could possibly help it.

PROFESSOR. Well, if you like to put it that way —

PILCHER. And now perhaps we might proceed. Can you remember the exact terms, Mr. Barron?

MATT. I am to pay a sovereign for every one of your hearers who has so far benefited by the wise admonitions of your last year's sermon as to have broken off his bad habits, or some especial bad habit —

LUCAS. We aren't bound to say what the habit is that we've broken off?

MATT. I don't wish to be inquisitive, but if you don't mention the particular bad habit, you will have to give me your word of honour that you've conquered it. (*Putting down proofs on table, taking up the money-box, giving it a shake.*) Now, who will be first to step into the confessional?

[*Looking round.*

DOLLY. I will. As I've nothing to confess.

MATT. Nothing?

DOLLY. No. I had what some husbands might think a bad habit, but —

HARRY. No bills this Christmas, eh, Doll?

DOLLY. No.

HARRY. You're sure now, my darling?

DOLLY. None of any importance.

HARRY. What do you mean — of any importance?

DOLLY. Well, you must have some bills — they grow up before you know — such as doctors' bills — you can't settle them all on the spur of the moment, but I've

nothing — nothing of importance. So please put in your sovereign for me, Dad, and look pleasant about it.

MATT. You declare upon your word of honour that you have broken off your bad habit of running up bills?

DOLLY. Yes.

MATT. Entirely?

DOLLY. Yes. You said you would n't be inquisitive.

MATT. Yes, but —

PILCHER. Mrs. Telfer has given her word. I think I may claim one victory for free will (*nodding victoriously at the Professor, who shakes his head*), and one sovereign for the Blanket Club.

MATT. Hum! (*Draws a sovereign out of his pocket and very reluctantly drops it into the box; shakes his head at Dolly, who looks a little uncomfortable.*) Who volunteers next?

RENIE. I do. No — I 'll wait a little — I want to make sure that I am perfectly honest with myself and with everybody.

MATT. That perhaps may need a little consideration, Lucas?

LUCAS. Oh, let Harry have his doing first!

MATT. Now, Harry!

HARRY. Oh, well, here goes! I 'm going to make a clean breast. The fact is I 've made a thundering mess of it.

MATT. Ah!

HARRY. I did begin all right except for a little tiff with Dolly — and then I kept on pretty well for some time, and then — well, I don't know — I seemed to go all to pieces and — (*Matt rattles the money-box.*) However, better luck this year.

PILCHER. Shall we say a little more resolution?

HARRY. Oh, I mean to pull myself together this year.

MATT. Perhaps you tried too much reforming, Harry — too many irons in the fire, eh?

HARRY. Well, it's jolly hard to keep it up. And I'd got pretty slack till you woke us up last night — I say, that was a rouser again.

PILCHER. It was n't a very bad sermon, was it? Well, now for the next year shall we make one especial effort in one especial direction? Say —

DOLLY. Temper, eh, Harry?

HARRY. Right, old girl! Oh, I mean it.

MATT. No victory for free will, and the Blanket Club, this time. Game and game, eh? Now, which of you two —

[*Looking at Renie and Lucas.*

RENIE. I'll be your first victim. (*Coming into the middle of the room, and posing.*) It's so strange that what you started as a jest —

MATT. Oh, no, in deadly earnest, I assure you.

RENIE. In this life who knows what is jest and what is earnest? The least little innocent thing may turn to a tragedy in a moment —

MATT. Surely you have n't had any little tragedies?

RENIE. No, last year a mere little circumstance might have turned to a tragedy — honestly I was n't to blame, but perhaps I was a little careless, and two dear friends came to me with their counsel, and what might have been a tragedy was turned to a comedy, thanks to those two dear friends!

PROFESSOR. My dear, may I ask what "circumstance" you are alluding to?

MATT. We said we would n't be inquisitive —

PROFESSOR. No, but I cannot recall anything in my wife's life during the last twelve months that even approached a tragedy —

RENIE. I said the affair was quite unimportant —

PROFESSOR. Then I wish, my dear, you would n't magnify everything, and I wish you would read solid scientific works in place of rubbishy French novels — and above all, take a little more regular exercise!

MATT. Perhaps Mrs. Sturgess may consider that little point during the coming year. Meantime (*to Renie*) may we be confident your little tragedy is ended —

RENIE. Oh, yes, quite.

MATT. We need n't ask its nature, but you give us your word of honour?

[*Looks at her very searchingly and speaking seriously.*

RENIE. Yes, my word of honour.

MATT. Thank you.

PILCHER. Another victory.

MATT (*looks searchingly at her, drops a sovereign in the box*). Lucas?

LUCAS (*coming cheerfully forward*). My turn for the thumbscrew!

MATT. You seem very cheerful about it.

LUCAS. Yes, I 'm going to make a jolly good show.

MATT. What particular bad habit have you conquered during the past year?

LUCAS. I don't know that I 've conquered any one in particular, but I 've had a regular good go in all round, so altogether I can pat myself on the back.

MATT. But I want to know one particular habit conquered — for instance, you were n't very careful what ladies you made love to, or how many of them at the same time —

LUCAS. I say, Uncle Matt, drop this —

MATT. And a year or two ago you went just a little bit off the straight —

LUCAS. Oh, no, I did n't.

MATT. I want to know —

LUCAS. Thank you, no more thumbscrew. I 'm out of this before it goes any further.

MATT. It is n't going any further. (*Putting his hand on Lucas's shoulder.*) Give me your word of honour —

LUCAS. That 's all very well, it was n't a very bad case, and I don't think you should have brought it up. But as you have — well, I did meet a lady, and I was very

much attracted to her, but I summoned all my resolution, and there the matter ended.

PILCHER. I think I may claim a victory here.

LUCAS. So please put in your sovereign.

MATT (*very seriously*). If you will give me your word of honour that you have absolutely broken off —

LUCAS. Yes, yes, of course I have.

[*Matt puts in a sovereign, hands the box to Pilcher.*

PILCHER. Three victories and one draw out of four. Most satisfactory. (*Taking out watch.*) I must hurry off to the White House and see what they're doing there. (*Rattling the box.*) Excellent results! So excellent that I think I'm justified in making you a little New Year's gift.

[*Going to his heap of brown-paper parcels.*

DOLLY. A New Year's gift! How kind of you! To me?

PILCHER (*opening his parcel*). To you and your husband. To your husband in particular, because, although he may have fallen a little short of perfection during the last year — like some of the rest of us — yet I feel sure that during this coming year — (*They have all been watching him curiously; he has now opened the parcel and displays a very bright brand-new collecting-box, with Crookbury Blanket Club painted on it, in large letters. It is much larger than the hospital-box.*) My household regulator!

[*Giving it to Dolly.*

DOLLY (*who has shown considerable disappointment on the opening of the parcel*). Crookbury Blanket Club! Thank you so much, for Harry's sake. Harry! For you, dear. (*She gives the box to Harry, who places it on the same table.*) You call it the household regulator?

PILCHER. Yes — I have suggested it to several of my brethren. Oh, its use will become very general throughout the diocese.

DOLLY. You think it will work well?

PILCHER. It cannot fail. A box of this character — larger or smaller, according to the size of the family and their behaviour — is left at each house on the first of the year. All little failings, peccadilloes, and asperities are strictly fined. The inevitable result is that either the family behaviour improves, or the parish charities benefit. I 'm starting its operation in my parish to-day. Forgive any inexcusable rudeness in leaving the first box with you. I must hurry off! (*Shaking hands.*) Good-bye, Professor.

PROFESSOR. I should like to make that point clear with regard to free will —

PILCHER. When you have an hour, or shall I say a year, to spare, we might argue it out —

PROFESSOR. You 're going to the White House? If I might accompany you —

PILCHER. Delighted!

[*Shakes hands in dumb show with Dolly and Harry.*

PROFESSOR. Renie, you 've had your restless fits again. You 'd better come with us —

RENIE. But I 've already been walking —

PROFESSOR. My dear, this bracing country air is just what you need. Keep out in it all the day long —

RENIE. Oh, very well — the White House, and the fish-pond as usual, I suppose?

PROFESSOR. As usual. Come along.

[*Exit Professor. Renie slightly shrugs her shoulders, very slightly glances at Lucas and exit after Professor.*

LUCAS. The dear old fish-pond! We might all take a stroll there!

MATT. Good idea! The dear old fish-pond! We might all take a stroll there!

[*Linking his arm with Lucas's.*

LUCAS (*suspicious, holding back*). I don't know that I care — we went there last year —

MATT. We did! Same old game, eh? Come along.

[*Drags Lucas off.*

PILCHER (*has been gathering up his parcels*). Well, good-bye! Good-bye! (*Rattles the hospital-box vigorously.*) Three splendid victories for free will and moral resolution!

[*Exit Pilcher, rattling the box.*

HARRY. Doll, you really have n't got any bills this year?

DOLLY. No! no! Only the few little oddments that no woman can prevent.

HARRY. You might let me see the little oddments —

DOLLY. I will. (*Suddenly.*) Oh, Harry, I quite forgot! Do forgive me!

HARRY. What?

DOLLY. I never wrote the geyser bath people!

HARRY. Never mind the geyser bath.

DOLLY. And only this morning you rowed me because I had n't got it ready for the New Year! Where did you put their address?

HARRY. I don't know! Somewhere upstairs among my papers.

DOLLY (*gently pushing him off*). I can just catch to-night's post! Make haste and get it! Quick! There's a dear! And then we can get the bath fixed up for you next week.

HARRY. Ye—es. I say, Doll, I mean to get those oddments fixed up to-night.

[*Taps the writing-case significantly and exit. Dolly looks frightened, sees him off, goes up to writing-desk, takes out bills, looks at them, throws up her arms in despair, groans, slams down the writing-desk, looks at the chair she has touched in first act, shows great resolution, marches up and touches it.*

DOLLY. Yes! Yes! I have got free will. (*Goes back from it, again looks at it, again marches up to it, touches it.*) Then why do I keep on having bills?

[*Renie enters in great agitation and distress.*

RENIE. Oh, Dolly!

DOLLY. What 's the matter?

RENIE. Oh, Dolly!

DOLLY. What is it?

RENIE (*throws her arms round Dolly affectionately*). You 've always been such a true friend to me —

DOLLY. Yes, dear.

RENIE. More like a sister. And I know I may trust you now.

DOLLY (*a little suspicious*). Yes. Has anything happened?

RENIE. Yes. Oh, Dolly —

DOLLY. Tell me!

RENIE. As we were going out at the garden gate, Captain Wentworth held out a letter behind his back for me to take —

DOLLY. What!

RENIE. But now his arm is wounded he could n't manage it properly, and he dropped it. I hurried to pick it up, and then my husband noticed and insisted on reading it —

DOLLY. What was in the letter?

RENIE. It was n't so very bad, but my husband has chosen to jump to a wrong conclusion, and — oh, Dolly, you can help me!

DOLLY (*coldly, relaxing her embrace*). How?

RENIE. If you 'd only let me tell my husband that I was receiving it for you —

DOLLY. What!

RENIE. There was no address, and fortunately it was so worded that it showed that you were n't really guilty.

DOLLY. Oh! I was n't really guilty?

RENIE. In fact, it proves your complete innocence.

DOLLY. I 'm glad of that.

RENIE. Then you 'll let me say it was you?

DOLLY. No! You can't suppose I should let my own cousin make love to me in my own house?

RENIE. You won't help me?

DOLLY. Yes, any way but that! How could you be so foolish?

RENIE. I don't know. When I heard yesterday he was coming, I quite made up my mind I'd have nothing to say to him! Dolly, free will must be an illusion, or else why am I always doing the things I don't mean to do? Oh, what shall I do?

DOLLY. As you are completely innocent, you'd better ask your husband to forgive you.

RENIE. Ye—es. No! As it is a perfectly pure and exalted attachment, I shall take that ground—at any rate at first—and see what he says. You'll help me all you can?

DOLLY. Yes, but promise me you'll have nothing to do with Lucas in future!

RENIE. No, indeed! if I once get out of this.

DOLLY. Very well! I'll see what I can do.—Hush!

[*The Professor enters with a letter in his hand, Matt soothing him.*

PROFESSOR (*very angry*). Not a word more, if you please. Mrs. Telfer, you have doubtless heard—

DOLLY. Yes—?

PROFESSOR. I leave for London to-night to consult my lawyer. Mrs. Sturgess will, I trust, return to her friends until—

MATT. Perhaps Mrs. Sturgess may be able to explain—

PROFESSOR. What explanation can be offered of language like this? (*Reading from letter.*) "From the first moment I saw you, I felt that you were entirely different from any woman I have ever met—" A monstrously inexact statement to start with. And a woman who is capable of practising such deceit—

[*Renie bursts into tears.*

MATT. I think you ought to hear what Mrs. Sturgess has to say—

RENIE (*through her tears*). What would be the use? With such a nature as his he could never begin to understand the loyal and exalted devotion which Captain Wentworth feels for me! No, all my life I have been

misunderstood, misjudged, condemned! Let it be so till the end! Dolly, come and help me pack!

[*Exit Renie. Matt goes up to table and takes up proofs of Professor's book and looks through them.*

DOLLY. You're really too severe with poor Renie—

PROFESSOR. I am not severe. I simply register the inevitable sentence of the husband upon the wife who misconducts herself!

DOLLY. Misconducts herself! She has merely had a little harmless flirtation—

PROFESSOR. In my wife a flirtation of this character (*pointing to letter in his hand*) constitutes grave misconduct.

DOLLY. But that's perfectly ridiculous! Why, it might happen to any woman! Dad, explain to him—

MATT. Professor, you're taking altogether a wrong view of this. Now this case you were pointing out to me in your own book (*pointing to proofs*) — Number forty-nine, Mrs. Copway. Remarkably handsome woman too!— (*Reading.*) "The injustice and cruelty of condemning this poor lady must be apparent to all." My dear Professor, before publishing this book you 'll have to modify your theory.

PROFESSOR. I cannot modify my theory. I have spent ten years in collecting facts which prove it.

MATT. Then, pardon me, you must really overlook Mrs. Sturgess's little indiscretion.

PROFESSOR. That is equally impossible—

MATT. But you say that her action in receiving my nephew's letter was entirely due to the activity of certain atoms in the grey matter of her brain.

PROFESSOR. Undoubtedly that is so.

DOLLY. Very well then, if her grey matter keeps on working wrong, what's the use of blaming her? You say yourself there's no such thing as free will—

PROFESSOR. Precisely, but I have always allowed that in the present low moral and intellectual condition of the

herd of mankind, free will is a plausible working hypothesis.

DOLLY. But it does n't work! Free will won't work at all! Look at my own case! Do you suppose I should go on all my life having bills if I could help myself? (*Catching Matt's eye, who looks at her gravely and holds up his finger.*) Never mind my bills! Do make him see how wrong and absurd it is to punish poor Renie when there 's no such thing as free will!

MATT. Dolly 's right! She 's only saying what you have so admirably laid down here. My dear Professor, you cannot possibly publish this book!

PROFESSOR. But it has been announced! I must publish it.

MATT. You cannot. Read that. (*Giving the Professor the book and pointing out passage.*) Surely after that you cannot condemn Mrs. Sturgess.

PROFESSOR (*taking book, glancing at the passage*). Really, it 's most annoying when one's own wife upsets —

MATT. Oh! they 're always making hay of our theories one way or the other.

PROFESSOR. Of course, if one presses the matter home to first principles —

DOLLY. Yes! Yes! Well, why not act on your own first principles! You ought to be very sorry for poor Renie, considering all she has suffered.

PROFESSOR. Suffered?

DOLLY. Yes, poor dear! You don't know what an awful struggle she has gone through between this unfortunate flirtation and her admiration for you.

PROFESSOR. Her admiration for me!

DOLLY. Yes! She always speaks of you as her great protagonist of science.

PROFESSOR (*mollified*). Does she? Does she?

DOLLY. Yes. If I were you I should go upstairs, and be very sweet to her, and above all don't reproach her. We women can endure anything except reproaches —

PROFESSOR (*looking at his proofs*). I must publish my book. And after all, as you say, it is useless to blame them for acting according to the—

MATT. The dictates of their grey matter when, bless them, they can't help themselves. My dear Professor, instead of condemning your wife, you ought to be condoling with her, and doing all you can to get her grey matter into a healthy condition.

PROFESSOR. I will hear what she has to say.

DOLLY. No. Go straight to her and forgive her, and then I'm sure her grey matter will soon be all right. And what a triumph that will be for you!

PROFESSOR. It does offer a way out of the difficulty. In any case I must publish my book.

[*Exit Professor.*

DOLLY. Dad, I won't have her here next Christmas.

MATT. No, my dear, I would n't.

DOLLY. That wretched Lucas!

MATT. What is to be done with him?

DOLLY. Pack him off. Pack him off at once!

[*Lucas cautiously looks in from upper conservatory door.*

LUCAS. I say, how's the old bird seem to take it?

DOLLY. Old bird!

LUCAS. He is n't going to make a shindy over a trifle like this?

DOLLY. Trifle! He's threatening to divorce her and expose you!

LUCAS. You don't say so. I'm awfully sorry!

DOLLY. Sorry!

LUCAS. I am, indeed! And any reparation I can make—

DOLLY. Reparation!

LUCAS. Such as an apology—

[*Dolly utters a contemptuous exclamation.*

MATT. Will you give me your word of honour never to see Mrs. Sturgess again?

LUCAS. Yes.

MATT. Or write to her?

LUCAS. Yes.

MATT. The word of honour of an English gentleman used to mean something, Lu.

LUCAS. It does now, Uncle Matt!

MATT (*shakes hands with him heartily*). Then I 'll take it. Now be off as quickly as you can and let us make the best of it for you and her.

LUCAS. Thanks. Good-bye!

MATT. Good-bye!

[*Lucas crosses to Dolly, offers his hand.*

DOLLY. No, Lu. If Renie gets out of this safely and if you behave yourself, I 'll shake hands with you when you come back from India.

LUCAS. You 're taking this too seriously — you 're taking it far too seriously!

[*Exit Lucas.*

MATT. We 're making a splendid start again for the New Year!

DOLLY. I hope this will be a lesson for Renie!

MATT. I hope so. How about yourself?

DOLLY. What do you mean?

MATT. I put the sovereign in, but — you 've got a few more bills, eh?

DOLLY. Just a few oddments.

MATT. How much?

DOLLY. I don't know. Dad —

MATT. Well?

DOLLY. Now that South Africans have gone up at last, and you won that splendid coup on them last week —

MATT. Well?

DOLLY. You could n't lend me — a few hundreds — till my allowance comes due? Just a few hundreds —

MATT (*in a low, reproachful tone, shaking his head*). What? What? What? Sad! Sad! Sad!!

DOLLY (*listens*). There 's Harry! You will help me, Dad — you will?

MATT. I'll see what I can do.

[*Harry enters cheerfully.*

HARRY. That's all right, Doll! There's the address.

[*Gives her a slip of paper.*

DOLLY. Thanks, dear.

HARRY. And now about these mere oddments?

DOLLY. Not now, dear.

HARRY. Yes, dear, now. (*Very sternly.*) This instant!

DOLLY. Harry, you're going to lose your temper—

HARRY. No. I'm going to keep a firm guard on it, but (*very sternly*) let me see those bills.

DOLLY (*creeps, frightened, up to the desk*). I'm sure you're going to lose your temper.

[*Opens the desk.*

HARRY (*firmly*). No. I'm quite calm. Whose bill is that? (*She hands him one timorously.*) Fulks and Garner! Artist Furriers! More artists! (*Looks at total.*) One hundred and twenty-four pounds. Well, I'm—

DOLLY. Ah, Jobling!

HARRY. I should think I am Jobling. And you said you'd never enter their shop again!

DOLLY. I never meant to, but this time it was absolutely necessary—

HARRY. Necessary?

DOLLY. Yes—you see the chief item—

HARRY (*reads*). Chinchilla toque, coat, muff and boa—eighty guineas—eighty guineas—

DOLLY. I got them as a surprise for you when we go South next week.

HARRY. Surprise! Great heavens! What in the name of all—

MATT. Sh, Harry! Her motive was a good one. She got it to please you!

DOLLY. You haven't seen it yet, it's just outside—I've a great mind to give you a great New Year's treat and let you see it on!

HARRY. I'm not going to be sweedled—

MATT. Hush! Harry! Let her put it on! Let's have a look at it, and see whether it's worth the money. Put it on, Doll.

[*Exit Dolly.*

HARRY (*calls after her*). I tell you I'm not going to be sweedled!

MATT. What is sweedled?

HARRY. Sweedling is sweedling! It's part swindling and part wheedling! It's what every d——d good-natured husband like me has to go through, when he's fool enough to put up with it!

MATT. Well, old boy, you'll have to pay, you know; it will come to that in the end.

HARRY. I'm not going to be sweedled —

MATT. And if Dolly has been a little extravagant, I must help her out with it to-morrow morning!

HARRY. No, we'll go into it thoroughly to-night.

MATT. No, Harry, we won't. My room is just above here. Besides, the cook is going to give us a special New Year dinner, and I want to enjoy it. This New Year we'll start with a comfortable evening, please!

[*Dolly enters at back in a very handsome Chinchilla coat. Harry looks a little sulky. She stands in the middle of the room and displays it.*

DOLLY. Well? (*He looks at it rather sulkily, walks away; she follows him.*) Well? (*Walking after him, displaying the furs.*) Well? Well?

[*He turns, looks at her; she stands and holds out her arms.*

HARRY. Oh, hang it all! (*Takes her in his arms and kisses her.*) There!

DOLLY (*kissing him heartily*). And there! (*Another kiss.*) And there! (*Another kiss.*) And there! (*Catches sight of the collecting-box, goes to it, and furiously sweeps it off its table on to the floor.*) AND THERE!

CURTAIN

THE DIVINE GIFT

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

CHARACTERS

Andrew Cutler
George Norton
Will Janway
John Treganza
Seccombe
Sandford

Lora Delmar
Evie Janway

THE DIVINE GIFT

ACT I

SCENE. *Andrew Cutler's very tastefully and carefully furnished study in an eighteenth-century house at Highgate. Wide French windows have been inserted in the wall at back, opening upon a balcony which looks immediately upon an old garden, and beyond the garden wall upon the wooded landscape that lies northwestward of London. Towards the back on the right side is a door. In the left-hand corner at back is a small curtained space with a wash-basin and towels. Near the audience in the wall on the left is an Adam's fireplace. Above it, fronting the audience, is a large comfortable old sofa. A flat writing-table is down on the right side, with an arm-chair placed by it on its right. The floor is almost covered by a rich Eastern carpet. The entire wall space is occupied by book-shelves containing well-bound volumes of all sizes and descriptions, such as would be found in the library of a man with cultivated literary tastes. All the furniture is of the best period in the eighteenth century. The room has nothing in it that is not beautiful or tasteful; it is not crowded, and gives an impression of unobtrusive richness and comfort. The time is near noon on a dull November morning. A bright fire is burning. The windows at back are closed, and the outside wintry landscape is dimly seen through a light grey mist.*

Discover Andrew Cutler and Seccombe, his secretary. Cutler is a distinguished-looking, intellectual Englishman about sixty; his features are regular, refined, and sharp; his complexion is rather pale; his eyes are bright and

piercing, and a little sunk under a fine unwrinkled forehead; his hair is silver-grey, his eyebrows silver-grey and a little bushy; he is well built and well preserved; of medium height. He is always well dressed. This morning he wears an easy silk smoking-jacket and fine embroidered slippers. He is walking diagonally across the room, smoking a cigar, and dictating to Seccombe.

Seccombe is seated at the writing-table taking down Cutler's sentences in shorthand. Seccombe is a short, dry, thick-set man about forty-five, with stolid features, and a laconic, stolid manner; coarse, sandy-grey hair, bald on the top; rather slovenly dress; he speaks slowly and rather gruffly with a cultivated accent. He is evidently on a footing of social equality with Cutler.

CUTLER (*walking, dictating*). The present rebellion of women and the present rebellion of labour throughout the civilised world may therefore be classed together as a twin revolt against the detestable and tyrannical conditions which misguided Nature has for the moment imposed upon the human species.

SECCOMBE (*writing*). "Species."

CUTLER. This twin revolt is wholly reasonable and wholly just. For what can be more unreasonable or more unjust than to demand from any cultured, self-respecting miner that he should toil and sweat in darkness and filth for eight, or even for four, hours daily, while other members of the same society are talking philosophy, or flirting with agreeable persons over coffee and cigars?

SECCOMBE (*looking up*). Aren't you cutting the irony a little too fine?

CUTLER. Impossible. Irony is a trap. You must always bait it so slyly that the fools swallow their purge and think it's sugar-candy. Joab kissed Abner as he smote him under the fifth rib. That's irony. Go on, Seccombe. (*Walking about, dictating.*) Again, what can be more unreasonable, more unjust, more viciously one-sided than that only one-half of human kind, and this

the weaker and more delicate sex, should be called upon to endure the agony of that other labour, whereby Nature has so carelessly and clumsily contrived that our race should be renewed?

SECCOMBE (*writing*). "Renewed."

CUTLER (*warming a little with his theme*). Moreover, this twin revolt is seen to be inevitable, and will be perpetual from the moment that labourers and women reach the lower standards of education prescribed in our Government schools. This rebellion will not subside under our present conditions. Least of all will it be frightened into silence by the ancient spectres of Duty and Religion. Clergymen and moralists may be entreated to pack up their venerable bogies.

[*Pause.*

SECCOMBE (*writing*). "Bogies."

CUTLER (*dictating*). For it is clear that to-day the whole Religion of labour is to throw down its tools. And the whole Duty of woman is to rebel—

[*Enter Sandford, announcing.*

SANDFORD. Mrs. Janway.

[*Cutler shows slight annoyance at being disturbed. Enter Evie Janway. Exit Sandford. Evie is a very pretty, well-dressed woman of about twenty-seven, with small, bewitching features, and an elegant figure, wrapped in expensive furs.*

EVIE. Good-morning, Guardy.

[*Kissing him.*

CUTLER. Good-morning, my dear.

EVIE. Good-morning, Mr. Seccombe.

SECCOMBE. Good-morning.

EVIE (*to Cutler*). Don't tell me you're busy, because you must n't be, just now.

CUTLER. I was just giving down an article.

EVIE. It can wait for half an hour? I'm sure it can.

CUTLER (*with a little rueful look at Seccombe*). Seccombe, would you mind stepping into the next room?

SECCOMBE. Certainly.

[*Exit Seccombe.*

CUTLER. I thought you'd gone back to Oakminster.

EVIE. So we did.

CUTLER. Up in town again?

EVIE. Yes.

CUTLER. You seem to be having a good time of it.

EVIE (*bitterly*). You think so? (*With conviction.*) Guardy, there is n't a more miserable woman in London than I am.

CUTLER (*looks at her for a moment*). Well, appearances are deceptive.

EVIE. But I *am* utterly miserable, utterly wretched.

CUTLER. Been having another tiff with Will?

EVIE. Tiff? We had a final quarrel the night before last, and a final understanding yesterday morning.

CUTLER. Then matters have reached a stable equilibrium?

EVIE. Please don't chaff me. I've come to you as my guardian, because I feel sure your sympathies will be on my side. (*She looks at him covertly; he does not reply.*) Aren't they? (*Goes to him very affectionately; throws him a pretty, bewitching look of entreaty.*) They ought to be.

CUTLER. Certainly, my dear; of course my sympathies are on your side. (*Evie kisses him affectionately.*) Now, this quarrel with Will — what 's it all about?

EVIE. Stanislas Karlinski and Madame Schneberger were giving a concert at Oakminster the night before last. So I booked places for Will and myself, went up to their hotel, and got them to promise to dine with us before the concert. I told Will we should have to sit down punctually at a quarter to seven, and asked him to get home from the factory and dress in time. Well, a quarter to seven came, and no Will. So we sat down — just four or five dainty little courses. At a quarter past seven, Will turned up with Mr. and Mrs. Pumphrey — all in morning dress.

CUTLER. Who are the Pumphreys?

EVIE. Business friends of Will's, rolling in money — the dullest and stupidest old fossils. Think of the British Museum, think of "God Save the King," think of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, and you 've got the Pumphreys.

CUTLER. I 've got them.

EVIE. Don't you think it was in very bad taste of Will to bring people like the Pumphreys to meet Stanislas Karlinski and Schneberger?

CUTLER. He certainly ought n't to bring people to dinner without letting you know.

EVIE. He did it simply to annoy me, and humiliate me before my friends.

CUTLER. Oh, I can't think that of Will.

EVIE. But he did. He knows my sensitive nature, and he constantly does things like that, merely for the pleasure of seeing me writhe and quiver. I feel like some poor, frightened little bird in the grasp of a cruel boy.

CUTLER. You don't look like it.

EVIE (*looks at him*). Ah, my dear Guardy, you 've only seen the outside of my married life!

CUTLER. Well, about this dinner — what did you do?

EVIE. I made the best of it, as I always do. I explained the situation to Karlinski and Schneberger in French, and apologised to them. Will immediately contradicted me in English, and apologised for me to the Pumphreys.

CUTLER. What happened then?

EVIE. After that I let things take their course. When I tried to make myself agreeable to Mrs. Pumphrey, Will sat and scowled at Stanislas Karlinski. When I asked the servants to hurry with our soufflé, Will told them to bring up the cold veal-and-ham pie. Can you imagine the situation?

CUTLER (*faintly*). What was the sequel?

EVIE. I passed it off quite amiably for the time, knowing that I should see Will alone when I came back from the concert.

CUTLER. And you did!

EVIE. Yes. When I got home the Pumphreys were just going. So I said "Good-night" to them very pleasantly and then—

[*Pause.*

CUTLER. Then there was what old-fashioned playwrights call a *scène-à-faire?*

EVIE. No, I didn't make a scene.

CUTLER. You carefully avoided it, as our modern dramatists do?

EVIE (*very reproachfully*). Guardy, I've thrown myself upon your sympathy at the supreme crisis of my life. You must please take me seriously.

CUTLER. I will, my dear, I will. Then after the Pumphreys had gone, you didn't make a scene?

EVIE. Not at first. All through the concert I was schooling myself to keep my temper, because I felt sure that would make Will lose his. I never feel myself so superior to Will as when he's raging and shouting, and I'm calm and dignified.

CUTLER. How did Will take it?

EVIE. He wanted to sulk off to bed.

CUTLER. Rather mean of him. You didn't let him?

EVIE. No. I said a few cutting, satirical things about the Pumphreys—

CUTLER. That drew him?

EVIE. Yes. He turned round on me, and stamped and shouted and swore—you never saw such a scene.

CUTLER. You kept calm and dignified?

EVIE. Yes. I was quite patient under it all, till he began to abuse my friends. That roused me. People may attack me as much as they please, and I remain silent. But the moment they attack my friends, all my better

instincts flame up. And when he called Stanislas a "greasy fiddler"—

CUTLER. You remained silent no longer?

EVIE. No, I told him exactly what I thought of all his friends and relations—particularly his Aunt Julia.

CUTLER. His Aunt Julia?

EVIE. She's a confirmed gin-drinker! Actually goes out to a public-house in her dressing-gown to get it.

CUTLER. Aunt Julia was a clinching argument. I hope Will had the decency to shut up after Aunt Julia.

EVIE. No. He raked out everything against my relations, and against everybody I had ever brought into the house. He bullied and raved, and threw a glass of whiskey over my new white satin dress.

CUTLER. That was wasting good whiskey and satin. Still, he'll have to pay for both. How did the situation develop after that?

EVIE. He almost struck me—

CUTLER. Almost?

EVIE. Well, he shook me. I called out for help, and then one of my fainting attacks came on. Instead of trying to bring me to, he sneaked off to bed, not knowing whether I was alive or dead. When I came to, I was alone. It was a quarter to two, so I staggered up to my own room as best I could. Don't you think it was brutal of him to leave me in that condition?

CUTLER. It wasn't very considerate. However, you had a thorough understanding yesterday morning?

EVIE. Yes. We discussed it quite calmly, and came up to town last night.

CUTLER. Will's in town, is he?

EVIE. Yes, he has gone to a lawyer's—

CUTLER. What for?

EVIE. To arrange for our divorce.

CUTLER. Divorce? On what ground?

EVIE. General grounds. We aren't in the least suited to each other.

CUTLER. Yes, but that ground would automatically dissolve nine marriages out of ten. Incompatibility of mental and social atmosphere? My dear Evie, you can't get a divorce for that, even in these easy-going days.

EVIE. Oh, yes, we can. Will has arranged to desert me. My lawyer will apply for a restitution of conjugal rights. Will won't obey the order of the Court. He'll take somebody down to Brighton and let my lawyers know. I shall bring a petition, and my lawyers will prove that the Brighton lady was n't me. That's all. It's quite the recognised thing.

CUTLER. Yes, I know. But I shan't recognise it. And I should have thought you would find it a very unpleasant business to be mixed up in.

EVIE. Oh, I shan't be mixed up in it, except just to go down to the Court. Will has to settle all the details.

CUTLER. Oh, that falls to the man?

EVIE. Of course! You would n't expect the woman to degrade herself. (*Coming up to him affectionately.*) Now, Guardy, you aren't going to be disagreeable and try to prevent my getting my liberty?

CUTLER. I shan't let you go through the Divorce Court, if I can help it. My dear Evie, you surely can't mean this. You have what most women would consider a very enviable lot — a tolerably good husband as husbands go, a pretty home, a handsome income; you come up to town every few weeks; you go everywhere, see everything; you've nothing to do but enjoy yourself. You ought to be happy.

EVIE. Ought to be happy? Of course I ought! No woman has a greater natural capacity for happiness than I have. Then why am I so miserable?

CUTLER. Happiness is a by-product. It's a deposit thrown down from work and duty. Do your duty fearlessly and your work thoroughly, and life secretes a residuum of happiness.

EVIE. It has n't secreted any residuum in my case.

CUTLER. What about the work and duty? It 's evidently your duty to go back to Will and make him a good wife. Come! He is n't a bad sort. Many women would be glad to have such a husband.

EVIE. Oh, I don't deny that Will has some good qualities. He would have made an excellent husband to a woman on his own level. And (*with great conviction*) what a splendid wife I should have made, if I had happened to find the right man!

CUTLER. What sort of a man would that be?

EVIE. One who could enter into all my aspirations, and share my love of art and beauty; surround me with congenial friends, instead of such people as the Pumphreys; encourage me to develop my own natural gifts, to do something great, be something great — how I could have worshipped such a man!

CUTLER. Such a man as —? For instance, among your old acquaintances, whom would you have chosen for a husband? Tom Standish?

EVIE. Oh, he thinks of nothing but himself. He smokes the best cigars, and lets his wife travel third class.

CUTLER. Lorry Baxenden?

EVIE. No, he thinks of nothing but his tailor.

CUTLER. Jim Crawshay?

EVIE. No, I should have to come second to his horses and dogs. I must be first or nowhere.

CUTLER. Roger Fennell?

EVIE (*disgusted*). Oh, no! He always paws you. I can't bear to be pawed.

CUTLER. Dr. Kernshaw?

EVIE. Oh, I could n't be a doctor's wife! Their work is so revolting. I should always be seeing operations.

CUTLER. Well, whom shall we say? Take your own choice.

EVIE. I 've often pictured the man —

CUTLER. But you 've never met him?

EVIE. No, but he exists. One day I shall meet him.

CUTLER. Not on this terrestrial sphere, my dear Evie. Meantime I should advise you to put up with Will as a makeshift.

EVIE. No, my dear Guardy. Will and I discussed it, and we have made up our minds for a divorce.

CUTLER. And then? What 's your next step?

EVIE. I 'm going out to Switzerland for the time —

CUTLER. While Will, like a good husband, stays at home and gets the divorce?

EVIE. Yes.

CUTLER. Well, you 'll have the best of him there. What are you going to do in Switzerland?

EVIE. I 'm going to find some restful, secluded place in the High Alps, where I can see things clearly, and map out some great future for myself.

CUTLER. What particular kind of great future?

EVIE. I can't say. I 've made one terrible mistake in life. I must n't make a second.

CUTLER. No, you must n't. But I 've noticed that when women forsake their natural vocation of love-making, they generally take up with something far less agreeable — parsons, nursing, slumming, female suffrage, dumb animals. Mrs. Leverett has tried them all, and now, instead of keeping a home for one husband, she keeps a home for forty cats.

EVIE. I shall not choose any ordinary vocation.

CUTLER. No?

EVIE. I could be quite content to inspire some man, if he, on his side, would share his fame with me, and let it be known that he owes it all to me.

CUTLER. Why not inspire Will?

EVIE. Inspire Will? He is a carpet manufacturer.

CUTLER. Inspire him to make better carpets.

EVIE (*looks at him reproachfully*). Dear, kind Guardy, do please take me seriously. Do please realise that I am in earnest. I long to inspire a man to write some

great poem, to paint some great picture! And you calmly tell me to inspire my husband!

CUTLER. Oh, I know other women's husbands offer the best raw material for inspiration. But that leads to difficulties. My young friend Dick Wilby got Mrs. Fitchell to inspire him to write his novels. Mrs. Wilby did n't like it, and now Dick has to pay his wife a thousand a year alimony; his books don't sell, and he's saddled with Mrs. Fitchell in a Bloomsbury lodging-house. And not a farthing's worth of inspiration can he get out of her.

EVIE. I should not enter into immoral relations with the man whom I inspire.

CUTLER. You would n't wish him to be your lover?

EVIE. Not in the objectionable sense. Romney was not Lady Hamilton's lover.

CUTLER. No. I believe their relations were quite proper. Like those of Dante and Beatrice.

EVIE. That is how I would prefer them to be. Then I should know his devotion to be thoroughly unselfish.

CUTLER. Rather hard on the poor fellow, not to throw him in some little bonus, eh?

EVIE. I must respect the man whom I inspire. And he must respect me.

CUTLER. Well, my dear Evie, I don't think there is much of a career for you as an inspirer. You 'll find it very difficult to catch your inspiree. Better try some other walk in life.

EVIE. Of course I would much rather make a name on my own account. And now that I am free, there are so many paths before me.

CUTLER. Such as —

EVIE. All the arts are open to me.

CUTLER. Yes, that 's the best of the arts — they 're always open to everybody.

EVIE. And I love them all! Painting, sculpture, literature — I wish you 'd read the first chapter of a novel

I've written — the stage, music — you're devoted to music — wouldn't you wish to see your little Evie a great musician?

CUTLER. Nothing would please me better. But —

EVIE. Now, you're not to discourage me. (*With intense conviction.*) Guardy, I feel, I know, I've got it in me — here!

[*Strikes her fist on her breast.*

CUTLER. We've all got it in us! The bother is, it won't come out. The artist has got it in him, and manages to bring it out. That's the difference between us and the artist.

EVIE. The difference between you and the artist, you mean! (*With intense conviction.*) I mean to bring it out! It's here! (*Striking her breast.*) It shall come out! I want to meet Lora Delmar again.

CUTLER. What for?

EVIE. I think I shall decide upon music, and I should like to talk over my future with her. She's a great friend of yours, isn't she?

CUTLER. I used to see a good deal of her three or four years ago, when George Norton and she first came together. Lately, I haven't seen so much of her. That night when you and Will met her here at dinner is the only time I've seen her for months.

EVIE. Couldn't you ask her here to meet me? I scarcely had any chance of speaking to her that night. Everybody wanted to monopolise her. I can't understand it!

CUTLER. What?

EVIE. Why, everybody raves about her.

CUTLER. She has a rare and beautiful personality, and a rare and beautiful voice. She's an actress who can sing, and a singer who can act.

EVIE. Yes, but other people can sing and act, and have rare and beautiful personalities. Really, I don't see why all the world should go mad about her! There's a Lora Delmar aeroplane, and a Lora Delmar handbag,

and they 've just brought out a Mousse Lora Delmar at the Ritz. Guardy, answer me one question?

CUTLER. Well?

EVIE. Why is that woman allowed to have nothing but triumph and adoration and happiness, while I have nothing but misery and disappointment? Why has she got all London at her feet, while I am buried in a dull little hole like Oakminster, among people like the Pumphreys?

CUTLER. Ah, now you 've got hold of the Philosopher's Puzzle. Why was this world constructed with such a brutal disregard for the wishes of its inhabitants? Why didn't I have the making of it? I should have laid it out as a velvet lounge for workingmen, and a garden paradise for women. And God has gone and made it so different.

EVIE. And she is n't a good woman. Everybody knows that. George Norton is her lover.

CUTLER. Morality curtsies to great artists.

EVIE. But you don't defend it?

CUTLER. No, I don't defend it. I accept it.

EVIE. And George Norton's wife accepts it?

CUTLER. Oh, George and his wife long ago arrived at an understanding that they should each go their own ways.

EVIE. And society accepts it, and knows all about it, and yet runs after her.

CUTLER. Yes; but not because she lives with George Norton. But because she has a wonderful voice that goes straight to the heart. We are right not to question a great artist, but to accept him. But right or wrong, we all do it. You do it. You dined with her here the other night, and you want to meet her again.

EVIE. I want to find out why it is she has got this tremendous hold upon everybody. I want to find out her secret.

CUTLER. Ah, don't, my dear Evie. Don't look at the roots.

EVIE. The roots of what?

CUTLER (*takes up a fine azalea in a pot*). Art is a flower that bursts out in a nation, or an individual, just where the vigour and health of the stem begin to exhaust themselves and die in bloom and perfume. It springs from — (*Digging up the earth in the pot*). It is nourished by the mud and manure and corruption of life. There's a lot of manure round these roots. Do you want to see it?

[*Turning up the roots.*

EVIE (*turns away disgusted*). Oh, don't!

CUTLER (*putting down the azalea*). I'll ask Lora Delmar to meet you, if you wish. But you won't find out much about her.

EVIE. I suppose there's a good deal to be known about her that's very horrid?

CUTLER. There's a good deal to be known about all of us that's very horrid. But it isn't worth knowing.

EVIE. She's married, isn't she?

CUTLER. Her husband died a year or two ago. I never met him. I never met her till George Norton brought her here.

EVIE. They say she has had several lovers.

CUTLER. They say — anything. I don't know what Lora Delmar's life was before she met George Norton. I do know what the lives of nearly all the supreme artists have been. They make the saddest reading. If you want information on the subject, read the memoirs of Rachel, the great French actress. No, don't. They'd only shock you. Read Matthew Arnold's sonnets to her. Don't dig up the manure round the roots.

EVIE. I don't see any reason why I shouldn't be a great artist, and yet remain a perfectly pure, good, respectable woman.

CUTLER. Very few women can be great artists, or even artists at all. Some women can't even be good and respectable. But I'm quite sure it's far better, and

far easier, for any woman to be good and respectable, than to be a great artist.

EVIE. You think it's impossible to be both?

CUTLER. I won't say it's impossible. And I do know that some of the greatest artists have wrecked their health, shortened their lives, and ruined their best work, by their passions and vices. Perhaps the Puritans were right. Perhaps it's better for a nation to have no art.

EVIE. Well, I've made up my mind to be a great artist. You'll help me, won't you?

CUTLER. How?

EVIE. You'll see that Will makes me a comfortable settlement, so that I can start on my artistic career without being worried about money.

CUTLER. I'm not going to help you to get a divorce, my dear Evie.

EVIE. Then we shall have to get it without you. You know, Guardy, you can't stop us. But it would help me so much if the world knew that I had your sympathy and support.

CUTLER. Suppose you don't bring it off as a great artist?

EVIE. I shall. I know I shall. I've got it here! Guardy, I do think you owe it to me to stand by me now. You allowed me to marry Will, though with your experience you must have seen that with my temperament I could never be happy with him.

CUTLER. I allowed you to marry Will because I thought you stood about as good a chance of being happy with him as you could expect with any man.

EVIE. Well, you see the result? Five of the best years of my life utterly wasted. Oh, why didn't you warn me?

CUTLER. Against marrying a thoroughly decent, healthy young fellow with six thousand a year?

EVIE. And not one single idea in common with me. Don't you think it was a little selfish of you, not to take more care that I married the right man?

CUTLER. My dear, if you remember, you were full of all

sorts of whims and fancies. You wanted to be this; you wanted to be that; you wanted to be everything. I thought marriage would be just the thing to cure you.

EVIE. But it has n't. Marriage has turned out an awful mistake. Well, I won't blame you, if you 'll only help me to repair it before it 's too late. Don't let me see the years going by, and find myself growing into a disappointed old woman with all my talents wasted.

CUTLER (*frankly*). The best thing that could happen to you would be to have a child.

EVIE (*annoyed and shocked*). Please don't harp on that again. I 've already told you so many times that I 've decided —

CUTLER. *You* have decided —?

EVIE. Surely a woman has a right to decide that.

CUTLER. Certainly. But if she does n't mean to have children, she ought n't to marry.

EVIE. That 's what I think. And, for the future, I want no husband but art.

CUTLER (*walks up and down a few steps, perplexed*). Look here, my dear Evie. You 've always wanted to live in London with congenial society. Let me see Will, and persuade him to give up the Oakminster house, get you a pretty little flat in Mayfair, where you can surround yourself with artists and delightful people —

EVIE. No. That would have satisfied me a year ago. It 's too late now. I have chosen my path. If I fail, I fail. But I shan't fail! I 've got it here!

[*Strikes her breast.*

CUTLER (*changing his tone to acquiescence*). Very well, my dear. Will 's in town — when can he see me?

EVIE. He 'll be busy all day arranging the divorce and other things. He said he could dine with you.

CUTLER. George Norton is dining with me to-night. I can't very well put him off, as he wants to see me about something important. Could Will come here at half-past six?

EVIE. Yes, I think. I'll send him to you.

CUTLER. Very well. I shall expect him.

EVIE (*very grateful*). Thank you, dear Guardy.

CUTLER. You aren't going out to Switzerland alone?

EVIE. No. Stanislas Karlinski has advised me to go to Mary Lambert for voice production. So I shall take her as a companion, and she will train my voice. Stanislas himself is to be out there too.

CUTLER. Oh! Well, let's hope the High Alps will clarify matters.

EVIE. Oh, it will! I feel a load is lifted off me. For the first time in my life I can breathe. (*Suddenly.*) I'm lunching with Gracie Challoner at the Ritz. I must be going. No, don't bother to come to the door with me. (*Glancing at watch on wrist.*) I must hurry! Goodbye, dear old Guardy. You'll be sure to make my settlements right with Will?

CUTLER. I'll do all I can.

EVIE. Thanks.

[*Kisses him. Exit Evie.*

CUTLER (*calls off at the open door*). Seccombe! (*Looks at his hands, which are dirty from the earth in the flower-pot; turns up his coat sleeves; opens curtains in corner. A wash-basin is behind them; he proceeds to wash his hands, leaving curtains apart.*)

(*Seccombe enters and seats himself at table. Sharpens his pencil.*)

(*Washing his hands.*) Tiresome hussies, women!

SECCOMBE. They haven't bothered me much since I was twenty-five.

CUTLER. Ah, you were engaged once.

SECCOMBE. Yes. I found out I'd let myself in for it. She threatened me with a breach of promise, so I paid down my three hundred pounds like a man and got out of it.

CUTLER (*comes out, draws curtains together, turns down his coat sleeves*). Now, let's get on.

SECCOMBE. I'm ready.

CUTLER (*walking up and down, dictating*). To sum up, this twin revolt of labour and woman is then a rebellion of more than one-half of civilised mankind against the fundamental laws and conditions of human existence. What is the remedy?

SECCOMBE (*writing*). "Remedy."

CUTLER. Clearly to change those fundamental laws and conditions. Nature is the author of them. To her, then, we must address our appeal.

SECCOMBE. "Appeal."

CUTLER. All-Beneficent Goddess, we beseech Thee to change the present order of the universe, which weighs so grievously on the feeble, the diseased, and the worthless. Especially do we entreat Thee to revoke Thy cruel command to them to beget their like, which mocks all our charity, defeats all our legislation, and encumbers us with ever-increasing misery and disorder. Cast a pitying eye on our distressed politicians, who, finding Thy present laws inhuman and unworkable, are laboriously engaged in voting against them, and will in any case continue to shut their eyes to them. Dear Goddess, ordain some gentler dispensation for the governance of this planet. Hasten a millennium of blessedness and comfort for everybody who can't and won't work himself, and won't let anybody else.

SECCOMBE. If this gets into the labour papers, they 'll burn you in effigy.

CUTLER. Many excellent theologians have been burnt in the flesh for airing unintelligible dogmas. I must n't mind being burnt in effigy for warning my working-men friends off a mirage. Proceed.

SECCOMBE. Ready.

CUTLER (*dictating*). It cannot be doubted that the Beneficent Goddess will hearken to our petition. She cannot have doomed the vast majority of mankind to constant and irksome toil. She cannot mean what she

says. She 'll think better of it. And the moment Nature changes her methods, our labour troubles will automatically disappear.

SECCOMBE (*writing.*) "Disappear."

CUTLER. For the widely spread rebellion amongst women, an equally sure and easy remedy seems to be at hand. The present inferior position of women is directly traceable to the disagreeable necessity which is at present laid upon them of becoming mothers. This necessity once removed, their status will be immediately raised to that of perfect equality with men. Here again we have simply to circumvent, or change, a manifestly cruel and unjust decree of Nature.

SECCOMBE. "Nature."

CUTLER. Happily the recent triumphs of science warrant us in hoping that a less clumsy and unmentionable means will soon be discovered of perpetuating the human race.

SECCOMBE. "Perpetuating the human race."

CUTLER. Already we may discern amongst civilised peoples some indications of the development of a neuter sex. If these indications are to be trusted, we are justified in looking forward to a period when the present disabilities and discontent of women will vanish in the establishment of a human sexual economy founded on the model of the beehive.

SECCOMBE. "Model of the beehive."

CUTLER. The gain to human happiness, human sanity, human progress, the relief to our nerves, which will follow this desirable innovation, cannot be estimated. For the first time in its history the human race will be able to devote itself to serious affairs. Once eliminate this wasteful pastime, this cheating folly, that we call love, from our daily lives, and we—

[*Enter Sandford.*

SANDFORD (*announces*). Madame Lora Delmar.

[*Enter Lora Delmar. Exit Sandford. Lora Delmar*

is a rather tall, dark woman, about thirty-five, with striking rather than beautiful features. She has large sad eyes, a full sinuous mouth, and a fine calm brow. Her face gives the impression that she has lived, and loved, and suffered. Her figure is elegant and supple. She is beautifully but quietly and tastefully dressed.

LORA. Good-morning, dear sage. (*Shaking hands.*) You're busy?

CUTLER. Never, when you can talk or sing to me.

LORA. You said I might always come in. Good-morning, Mr. Seccombe.

SECCOMBE (*has risen*). Good-morning, madame. (*Goes to door.*) Shall I wait?

CUTLER. No; come in after lunch. (*Exit Seccombe.*) I'm delighted to see you. I thought you were away in the provinces. (*Looks at her.*) What has brought you to town?

LORA. Oh, I'm so unhappy, dear sage. My heart is just dead within me. No, it isn't. I wish it was.

CUTLER. Poor child of the storm! What's the matter? George?

LORA (*just nods*). He's torturing me to death by inches. You don't mind my coming to you?

CUTLER (*very sympathetically*). No! No! Tell me all about it.

LORA. Thanks. I wouldn't have troubled you, but I've no one else. I've kept it shut up here for weeks. I had to tell some one, or let it drive me mad.

CUTLER. Very well, tell me. So George is behaving badly again?

LORA. Yes. I left London a month ago on my provincial tour. He promised to join me in two or three days. I knew he didn't mean to come, because — I've not been holding him for a long time now. He wrote, putting me off with excuses. I wrote to him again and again. He didn't answer. I couldn't bear it any longer — I had inquiries made. He'd gone to Paris with —

whom do you think? Belle Chillington, the music-hall Parroquet.

CUTLER. Parroquet?

LORA. She dresses in red and yellow feathers like a parrot, and has a vulgar scene with a drunken sailor, all screaming and swearing. And George has gone to her. Can you imagine why I love such a man ?

CUTLER. No. Why do you?

LORA. I can't help myself. These last weeks — you don't know what it has been — forcing myself to feel and sing words that meant nothing — smiling and bowing to the audience — then going back to a country hotel — the nights I 've spent, pacing up and down the room, with the senseless wall-papers grinning at me — tearing at them to get to him — making up my mind to go to Paris by the first train — and then to end it with a dose of morphia.

CUTLER. You won't do that?

LORA. The night before last I did buy the stuff. I poured it out, but I happened to catch sight of his photograph. Oh, my God! that a man should have it in his power to rack the woman who loves him as George Norton is racking me!

[*She buries her face in her hands and sobs. He stands over her and tenderly pats her shoulder. She continues to sob.*

CUTLER. Cry away! Ease your heart!

[*She gradually gets calmer, and at length ceases to sob and dries her eyes.*

LORA. There! I'm better now I've told you! Thanks!

[*Warmly grasps his hand.*

CUTLER. That's right! You've conquered yourself. And now! You'll have lunch with me, and go back to your tour. Where are you singing to-night?

LORA. Nowhere. I've broken up my tour.

CUTLER. Broken up your tour?

LORA. Yes, and sent my people away. Last night at

Chester all the places were taken — the audience was seated — I was dressed. I felt I could n't go on — I simply could n't, so it was announced I was ill. I went back to the hotel, and came up to London this morning.

CUTLER (*looks at her and shakes his head at her very gravely and reproachfully.*) What are you going to do?

LORA. Take the first train to George.

CUTLER. No! You must n't do that!

LORA. Yes, I must.

CUTLER. You say he 's in Paris?

LORA. He was there last week. I 'm going to find out if he 's there still, or where he is, and go to him.

CUTLER. No, no, no!

LORA. Yes, yes, yes!

CUTLER. Have n't you had misery enough with him?

LORA. Misery? (*With a little bitter laugh.*) If you knew half!

CUTLER. Well, surely this ought to convince you —

LORA. Of what?

CUTLER. George Norton is n't worthy of you. He never has been worthy of you.

LORA. Don't I know that? Have n't I known it all through?

CUTLER. You surely won't be mad enough to put yourself in his power again? After this?

LORA. Yes, I shall. (*He makes a gesture of helplessness.*) Don't you think I know it 's madness? (*He looks at her pityingly.*) Yes, go on pitying me! I pity myself! I hate myself! I despise myself! I say to myself a hundred times a day that it can only bring me more misery. But I 'm going to do it, because — because I 'm a woman!

CUTLER. No. Because you 're a certain type of woman, and because you 're cursed — or rather, blessed — with a certain type of nervous system.

LORA. Cursed!

CUTLER. Cursed and blessed. Cursed for yourself, blessed for the public.

LORA. The public! I hate them. I laugh at them! These last weeks I've been singing wretchedly, carelessly, without any spark of real feeling. But they applaud me just the same. They praise me just the same. They don't know! They're geese! They're sheep! They're fools!

CUTLER. They're very good-natured fools about art and music. They mean well. And their instinct is generally right in the long run. It's right in your case. And they adore you, they worship you. They wait for hours in the cold and rain. They fight for places to hear you. They shout themselves hoarse, and drag your carriage through the streets! Surely you have a duty to them.

LORA. Duty?

CUTLER. Isn't it your first and highest duty in life to give them your very best, all that you have to give! You've no right to waste this divine gift of yours on such a man as George Norton.

LORA. I have a right to do what I like with my life. I have a right to give it to the man I love. And it isn't wasting my gift to love him. You know how splendidly I sang when I first knew him, how I burst on them night after night! It all came from him. It was my love for George I was singing. Whenever I've sung my best, it has been when I have loved him most, and felt surest of him.

CUTLER. But that's past. That's gone.

LORA. No! No! Don't say that.

CUTLER. But isn't it true? To-day George Norton is merely cutting your throat, rifling your voice, wrecking your career. And you know it. Don't you?

LORA. I don't care. I must go to him. Don't you think I've struggled to tear him out of my heart? I can't! He has twisted himself all round it. He has burnt into me, eaten into me! He is me! And when I think he's over there with that — I — (*makes an*

angry despairing movement) — I can't eat! I can't sleep! My life is dried up. I must go to him.

CUTLER (*looks at her for some moments*). I give it up.

LORA. What?

CUTLER. Trying to understand. Here are you, squandering all the treasures of your rich, full nature on what? George is good-looking, well-bred, witty, distinguished — I'm fond of him myself —

LORA. Well, then, can't you forgive me for loving him?

CUTLER. But now you know what he is — faithless, worthless —

LORA. I know he's worthless. I know he deceives me. What does that matter? A mother knows her son to be worthless. But she doesn't cease to love him.

CUTLER. You would have made a good mother.

LORA. Shouldn't I? I often think that's worth all the rest. But I've thrown away the best things in life, and now — I've only George. Don't try to part us. I can't give him up. Ah, dear sage, don't try to be wise for me. Let me be foolish for myself, please.

CUTLER (*after a long pause*). Then you've quite made up your mind to let George Norton ruin your life?

LORA. No. When I've won him back, I'm going to devote myself entirely to him.

CUTLER. What about your singing?

LORA. I'm not going to sing any more.

CUTLER. Not going to sing any more? You surely can't mean that?

LORA. Indeed, I do. Oh, how tired I am of it all! It's all acting; my own name doesn't seem real to me. Oh, how I hate it!

CUTLER. You may say that now. You won't say it in six months' time.

LORA. Yes, I shall. My singing days are over.

CUTLER. No! No! This is only a passing mood. You'll come out of it, and be your old, eager self, panting for fresh triumphs and fresh fame.

LORA. Fame? What's a singer's fame?

CUTLER. What's anybody's fame? Even Shakespeare's, if one thinks of it? A century or two of growing renown; a babble of confused criticism; a buzz of ignorant worship and applause; a tramp of Americans to his birthplace; a hash of his scenes, and a murder of his musical iambics by unversed actors; then, ten or fifteen thousand years of fading mention; a withering memory; a mere name; an echo fainter, and yet fainter; last of all, millions and millions of years of oblivion. Very empty, all of it! For all that, our pulses will jump when we hear those roars of applause you'll get at Covent Garden next season.

LORA (*shakes her head sadly*). I shan't get them. I don't want them.

CUTLER. What are you going to do?

LORA. I'm going to win him back.

CUTLER. Suppose you don't succeed?

LORA. I must! I shall! I've won him back before. I shall do it again.

CUTLER. And then — if he deceives you again?

LORA. I shall keep him this time. I'm going to try a different plan. I've been very selfish. I've given so much of my time and myself to my singing. I haven't always put him first. Now I shall be free to give him everything. I shall find out some dear little place in the country —

CUTLER. A rose-bowered cottage on a village green? Will that suit George for long?

LORA. Oh, I can take him to London, or Paris, or the South. I can always keep him when we're alone. And he's fond of country life.

CUTLER. Won't you soon tire of it yourself, and long for your work and your triumphs?

LORA. I'm sick of my triumphs! I loathe my work! Oh, I shall be so glad to be rid of it all, and live a real life at last. How I envy some women!

CUTLER. Such as—

LORA. Well, that silly little chattering friend of yours who dined here that night.

CUTLER. Evie Janway?

LORA. Yes. She lives in a dear old English town; she has a good, kind husband, plenty of money and friends —no heartaches, no sleeplessness, no miserable jealousies. She has never had to fight for her daily bread as I have done — she has n't to fight to keep the man she loves. Why should she have everything to make a woman happy, while I am tortured and torn to pieces as I am?

CUTLER. Ah, that rose-bowered cottage, on a village green, where happy peasants dance and perpetual summer reigns! Why don't we all live in it? Even I never get any nearer to it than Highgate. Yet if ever a man deserved unalloyed happiness, I do.

LORA (*looks at him a little searchingly*). You 've had your sorrows?

CUTLER (*after a glance into his past*). I have lived. But I 've had no fever of life for twenty-five years. I found a panacea.

LORA. A panacea?

CUTLER. When I was thirty-five, I looked round and asked what was the best thing I could wish for myself in life.

LORA. And what was that?

CUTLER. To possess my own soul. I had a good constitution, no overmastering passions, and a very comfortable fortune. I permitted myself no vice, and every luxury: the luxury of leisure; the luxury of a serene mind; the luxury of clear thinking; the luxury of the apt word; the luxury of the chiselled phrase; a little love, much friendship; a little science, much literature; a little art, much music; the best editions; fine glass, fine china, fine silver, fine linen, rare vintages.

LORA. But we can't all have these luxuries.

CUTLER. Scarcely one of them will be attainable in a pure democracy. So I remain an aristocrat — the last of the Tories, the last of the aristocrats. There's only one luxury I have n't been able to allow myself — the luxury of living in the eighteenth century. Still here I am, passably content.

LORA (*looks at him for some moments*). I don't know that I envy you. No. One hour of love is worth it all. I think I pity you. What you have lost!

CUTLER. What I have gained! My panacea is of no use to you?

LORA. Not the least.

CUTLER. I knew it would n't be.

LORA (*after a moment.*) I want you to come to Paris with me.

CUTLER. What for?

LORA. To help me win him back.

CUTLER. Surely you are the only one who can do that.

LORA. You can make it easier for me. He 'll listen to you.

CUTLER. I've met a dozen men who would listen to advice on matters of love. I've never met one who would take it. And certainly George Norton won't.

LORA. Yes — he likes you, he admires you. And his father made him promise he 'd always look upon you as his best friend.

CUTLER. And so George does. And I promised his father I 'd always keep an eye on George. And so I do. But there it ends. I have no influence upon him.

LORA. Yes, you have, more than you think. Ah, dear sage, do help me! You don't know how miserable I am!

CUTLER. You 're determined to go to him?

LORA. Yes; I 'm going from here to the inquiry office to get his address.

CUTLER. Well, you need n't go to Paris for him. George is dining with me here to-night.

[*Her face changes and lights up with joy and hope;*

her movements and words are bright, quick, excited, eager.

LORA. Dining with you to-night? Has he left her?

CUTLER. I don't know.

LORA. I'll dine with you, too. Don't say you won't have me. You will, won't you? What time?

CUTLER. Eight o'clock.

LORA. I'll be here. Then he's in London? What's his address?

CUTLER. He wrote from the Club, saying he wanted to see me, and inviting himself to dinner.

LORA. I might see him this afternoon — No, perhaps that would n't be the wisest thing to do.

CUTLER. The wisest thing would be — to leave him alone.

LORA. Ah, don't talk, don't talk!

CUTLER. The next least foolish, to let me have him here to dinner alone.

LORA. No, I'm coming.

CUTLER. Very well. It might be awkward for us to sit down to dinner, if he did n't expect you. George needs careful handling sometimes.

LORA. Don't I know it?

CUTLER. I'll send him a wire to get here about seven, and I'll see him first.

LORA. Oh, that's kind of you. You'll do all you can for me?

CUTLER (*with a sigh*). Yes, I'll try to arrange a new lease of unhappiness for you.

LORA. No! No! Well, if I am unhappy — so be it. But this time I shall keep him. Tell him — you know what to tell him.

CUTLER. I'll pack as much persuasion as I can into half an hour. Then you come in about half-past seven, and I'll leave you with him while I go to dress.

LORA. Thanks! Thanks!

CUTLER. Now, what shall we give George for dinner?

LORA. Oh, I'll leave it all to you.

CUTLER. Well, I may not be able to mend your broken heart, but I can give you a good dinner.

LORA. You 're a friend indeed. I must run away. I've got to see about some things at the dressmaker's. I must look my best to-night. Au 'voir. Thanks! Thanks!

[*Going towards door, offering her hand.*

CUTLER (*taking her hand, holds it, looks at her*). I'm doing you a great wrong—

LORA. No! No!

CUTLER. Yes, I'm doing you and English music the greatest wrong I can do you.

LORA. No! No!

CUTLER (*releasing her hand.*) But we shall soon hear you sing again?

LORA. I don't know. Perhaps. Yes, give him back to me, and I can't help singing. Half-past seven, then?

CUTLER. Half-past seven. (*He follows her off, and a moment later is heard to say, "The door, Sandford." In another moment he returns, stands gravely thoughtful in the middle of the room, with his hands in his pockets; takes out a letter from his jacket, reads.*) "As you may guess, it will be no easy or pleasant task to get clear of her. I am anxious to let her down as gently as possible. So I've run over from Paris to get you to lend me a hand. I want you to break it to her that this time it is final."

[*Shakes his head, sighs deeply, with a little shrug, raises his hands from his side, drops them helplessly.*

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE. *The same. Time, before dinner on the same day. The room is well lighted; the fire is burning brightly; the curtains are drawn over the windows, and all is cheerful and cosy.*

Will Janway enters, followed by Cutler. They are in morning dress. Will is a pleasant-looking, round-faced, well-built, ordinary young Englishman, rather over thirty.

WILL (*very excited and indignant*). And I'm hanged if I can stand it any longer!

CUTLER. But, Will, you oughtn't to bring people home to dinner without letting her know.

WILL. Without letting her know?

CUTLER. You brought these Pumphreys to dinner when she was entertaining her musical friends.

WILL. What! I told her in the morning that I'd asked the Pumphreys to a chop and a bird. She said: "We can't have the Pumphreys because I'm going to invite Karlinski and Schneberger." I said: "We must have the Pumphreys, because I've got a big business deal on with Pumphrey." "You can't bring the Pumphreys here to-night." "I shall bring the Pumphreys here to-night." "You will not bring the Pumphreys here to-night." "I shall bring the Pumphreys here to-night." And so on for an hour.

CUTLER. Time wasn't very valuable with you that morning?

WILL. Oh, yes, it was, by Jove! I had an important appointment at half-past nine. And she kept me there rowing till half-past ten. You know how women will hang on to any silly idea that gets into their heads.

CUTLER. They are tenacious of — what gets into their heads. How did you get out of the deadlock?

WILL. We did n't get out of it. I said at last (*tapping the table with his finger to emphasise each word*) "I shall bring the Pumphreys here at a quarter past seven." I said: "No dress or nonsense — just a good, plain, old-fashioned English family dinner."

CUTLER. These Pumphreys — they 're not quite Evie's sort?

WILL. No, thank God. They don't belong to her crew. Mrs. Pumphrey is the dearest, kindest, motherly old soul. And Pumphrey is a thorough downright John Bull Englishman — as decent an old boy as ever breathed — puts me on to no end of good things in business.

CUTLER. The dinner was not quite a success, Evie tells me.

WILL. No, by Jove! When we got there we found Evie with a jowly Russian fiddler on one side of her, and a plastered-up, yellow-haired old squawker on the other. They were half through some greasy French mess that looked like vaseline, with lumps of black leather in it. Evie had brought in a job cook from the French restaurant. She calls that giving a dinner-party.

CUTLER. The French cuisine has its caprices.

WILL. The Pumphreys and I sat down at our end of the table, and I ordered some cold meat pie.

CUTLER. And then the conversation became general?

WILL. I did my best to make myself agreeable to the jowly fiddler, while she glared at the Pumphreys, and made fun of them in French to the yellow old squawker. So I explained to the Pumphreys what Evie was saying about them. That sent her off in a furious huff to her concert, and Pumphrey and I had a comfortable evening over a bottle of port.

CUTLER. And after the concert? More harmony?

WILL. The moment Evie came in I saw she wanted to have a row.

CUTLER. You indulged her?

WILL. I did! After a quiet little skirmish, she went at me hammer and tongs, ragged all my friends and relations, snorted about the room, flung her arms about, knocked a glass of whiskey over her new evening dress, and screamed herself off into hysterics. I slipped quietly off to bed.

CUTLER. The night brought wisdom?

WILL. Yes, we got up and talked it over quietly, and made up our minds to part.

CUTLER. Divorce?

WILL. Divorce, as soon as we can put it through.

CUTLER. Won't you find that rather an (*sniffs*) unsavoury job?

WILL. Oh, it 's a dirty nuisance. But, of course, you 've got to keep the woman out of it. So what am I to do?

CUTLER. Can't you give Evie a little flat in town, let her have her own friends, come up occasionally to see her, and so rub along for a year or two?

WILL. No, I'm not going to be a married bachelor. You know what that means. No! I've had five years of it; and now I'm going to clear out for good, and make a fresh start.

CUTLER. You 'll marry again?

WILL. Not I, by Jove! It 's too much of a risk.

CUTLER. What then? You 're a healthy, vigorous man of— How old are you?

WILL. Thirty-two.

CUTLER. You don't propose to live a life of total abstinence?

WILL. Well, not exactly total—

CUTLER. What quantity, and quality, and variety of feminine companionship do you propose to allow yourself? Don't tell me. I don't wish to know. But ask yourself.

WILL. I mean to go as straight as I can.

CUTLER. How straight will that be?

WILL. Well, as straight as a decent, healthy, not bad-looking chap can be expected to go. I don't pretend to be a saint.

CUTLER. No. And saints often allow themselves considerable latitude in this matter, so as to qualify themselves for admonishing sinners more severely. Putting saints aside, as untrustworthy guides for conduct, how straight do you mean to go? Don't tell me. You know your own past history.

WILL (*after a little reflection, bursts out*). It's nothing but one eternal, confounded, silly mess-up from the time you're eighteen! If you go fooling about generally, you very likely get yourself disabled for life; and suppose you don't, it knocks you to bits, and you're ashamed to look a decent woman in the face. If you take on some chorus girl, she sells you all round, draws all your cash, and then throws you over. If you pick up some little milliner or office girl, you get her into trouble, and she hangs round you so that you can't shake her off. And if you make up your mind to cut it altogether, you don't have a moment's peace till you cave in; and then you feel you've made a thundering ass of yourself both ways. So what are you to do?

CUTLER. The best solution seems to be a strictly temperate life in youth, with constant hard occupation till you're married.

WILL. Married? And then you get landed that way! And nine times out of ten you turn out all the worse husband for not having had your fling before. How many husbands are there that go perfectly straight?

CUTLER. There are no statistics.

WILL. And how many of them have had their fling before?

CUTLER. The Government is too busy to order a Parliamentary return.

WILL. It's a beastly puzzling riddle.

CUTLER. It is a riddle. But every man has got to find an answer.

WILL. I give it up.

CUTLER. Then you drift about all your life in helpless confusion. Every man has got to rule and placate his woman through ruling himself — or perish. Every nation has got to rule and placate its women through ruling itself — or perish.

WILL. Well, I've tried it all round, and I've come to the conclusion: you can neither live with them, nor without them.

CUTLER. That is the exact dilemma. Upon which horn of it do you propose to impale yourself?

WILL. Which horn did you impale yourself on when you were young?

CUTLER. The wrong one — necessarily. Like the saints, I have qualified myself by sinning to be an example to evil-doers.

WILL. You never got married?

CUTLER. No. I looked round the human Zoo, but I couldn't see any animal that I desired for a lifelong mate. The gazelle had beauty and grace, but little sense. The tigress had beauty and allurement, but she would have devoured me. The parrots were smartly dressed, but they chattered too much. The camel would have borne my burdens, but she had a detestable profile. The monkeys had many of my tastes and habits, but their talk was scarcely above the level of a modern society comedy. I watched a little squirrel — it was dainty and cheerful and tame, but it fidgeted incessantly. Not one of them had any taste for literature. I hesitated before a lovely bird of paradise, and flirted with her till I found she was utterly stupid. A beautiful soft-eyed Scotch collie came up to me and nosed my hand, but she was sorrowing for her dead master, and had no love to give me. Then I inquired my way to the phœnix cage; but when I got there, I found it empty. So I never married.

WILL. Then what did you do?

CUTLER. I had weeks and months of hard study, self-discipline, and self-denial, with occasional filthy revels amongst the fleshpots. But I never lost hold of myself, and I never fell under the dominion of any woman for longer than half an hour.

WILL. What luck!

CUTLER. No, merely normal masculine competency. That went on till I was well past thirty. My early manhood was passing; the fleshpots were growing more pleasant, and my descents amongst them more frequent. One morning I woke and looked in the glass: my face was a little bloated; my eyes were reddish, and watery, and shifty; my tongue was furred, and my hand shook. I couldn't read "Paradise Lost" with any pleasure. I had what religious people call a sudden conversion. I saved my soul on the spot.

WILL. You don't mean you pulled up altogether?

CUTLER. From that moment. Sophocles didn't escape from the savage master till he was seventy. I shook him off at thirty-five.

WILL. Didn't you find it a pretty hard job?

CUTLER. Not in the least. Virtue is a mere habit. We never know how easy it is till we practise it.

WILL. And women haven't bothered you since?

CUTLER. Very rarely and distantly. When once I found myself secure on the bank, I stayed there. And now sometimes I look down into the slimy whirlpool, and see the blind eels twisting and wriggling and curling round each other, feeding on the rank weeds — I turn away and look heavenwards.

WILL. Yes. I'll look heavenwards when I'm sixty.

CUTLER. And meantime?

WILL. Oh, I intend to go as straight as I can — I suppose I shall go and make a damned fool of myself.

CUTLER. Is that inevitable?

WILL. Well, what am I to do?

CUTLER (*looks at him*). It's strange.

WILL. What is?

CUTLER. So many of us would n't live for a day in a dirty disordered room; yet we live all our lives in dirty disordered minds.

WILL (*with strong conviction*). You know I should have made a jolly good husband, if I 'd only married the right sort of wife.

CUTLER. Such as —? Amongst your own acquaintance whom would you choose?

WILL. Well, the right sort. A woman who 'd fall in with my ways, and try to understand me. Evie has never understood me.

CUTLER. Have you ever understood her?

WILL. No, I 'm hanged if I have!

CUTLER. It is questionable whether skill in character reading tends to promote married happiness. Rather the reverse, I should say. Now this unknown fair, with whom and for whom you propose to make a damned fool of yourself?

WILL. I don't *propose* to make a damned fool of myself.

CUTLER. No, but you will. Do you think you are likely to be any happier with her than you are with Evie? Won't you be robbed, tricked, deceived, perhaps dragged into some disgraceful scandal? You have your own set of friends. You can't introduce her to them. Your whole business and social life will be disarranged and confused. Aren't you almost sure to be less happy than you are now? Had n't you better humour your present situation with Evie?

WILL. No, I 've humoured the situation, and I 've humoured Evie, and they both get worse. No! Evie and I have got to part. We don't agree about anything else, but we do agree about that. And I want to talk with you about the settlements —

[*Enter Sandford.*

SANDFORD. Mr. Norton is here, sir.

CUTLER. Just a minute, Sandford.

(*Exit Sandford.*)

George has come to dinner, and he wants a little talk first. The settlements will take some time—won't they?

WILL. No. Why should they? If Evie takes out of the concern what she brought into it, that ought to satisfy her?

CUTLER. I don't suppose it will.

WILL. If it does, it will be the only thing in life that ever did.

CUTLER. You wish to treat her generously, I'm sure.

WILL. I expect I shall have to. (*Groans.*) It cost me a heap of money to marry her; it has cost me a heap to keep her; and now it's going to cost me a heap to get rid of her.

CUTLER. Life is full of costly experiments. Where are you staying?

WILL. At the Lancaster.

CUTLER. Evie is with you?

WILL. Oh, yes. We're dining together and going to the theatre. We're on better terms than we've been for months past.

CUTLER. I'll come to you at ten to-morrow. We'll see what Evie wants, and then go to Harland's office, and get him to make out a draft agreement.

WILL. Right. Then we can get to business.

[*Cutler goes to the door and opens it.*

CUTLER (*speaking off*). Ah, George, come in!

[*George Norton enters, in evening dress. He is a dark, handsome, distinguished, well-bred man about thirty-five, with quiet, easy, careless manners.*

NORTON. How are you? (*Shaking hands with Cutler.*) How d'ye do, Janway?

[*Nodding to Will.*

WILL. How d'ye do?

NORTON. Mrs. Janway quite well?

WILL. First-rate, thanks.

NORTON. Remember me to her, will you?

WILL. I will. (*To Cutler.*) Ten o'clock to-morrow, then.

CUTLER. I'll be there. (*Opens door, calls off.*) The door, Sandford.

WILL. Good-evening, Norton.

NORTON. Good-evening.

WILL (*to Cutler*). Good-bye.

CUTLER (*shaking hands*). Good-bye.

[*Exit Will. Cutler closes the door after him.*

NORTON. I'm here to time. You got my letter about Lora?

CUTLER. Yes, I'm sorry, deeply sorry.

NORTON. Yes, it's a pity, poor girl. But that's how it is. Natural course of events in all these affairs. Hot love, passionate devotion, eternal fidelity; gradual cooling off on the part of one or both; bother to keep it up; infernal boredom; tugging at the chains; and then common sense comes in and says, "What's the use? You know you're damned sick of it all. Why not own up and get out of it?"

CUTLER. So you're going to get out of it?

NORTON. I am.

CUTLER. Do you realise what you are throwing up? The entire love and devotion of a beautiful, accomplished woman — a woman without the freaks and pettiness and childish vanities of her sex — a large, generous creature — a woman who has London at her feet, and could choose her lovers by the dozen — a great artist, with her divine gift — something altogether beyond and away from the ordinary woman —

NORTON. Oh, come down to bedrock — and a woman's a woman.

CUTLER. Ah, then you don't realise.

NORTON. Yes, I do. Lora is a prize for any man; and I've been very lucky to find a woman who has helped me to spend four years very pleasantly. But the four years have gone; and now I have the wretched bad taste not to wish for another four years, or four weeks, or four days.

CUTLER. You 're right. You have wretched bad taste.

NORTON. I know it! I know it!

CUTLER. And you 're making a great mistake.

NORTON. I feel sure I am. Who does n't with women?

CUTLER. She has given you the four best years of her life. You have taken from her the power to love another man deeply. Aren't you bound to stand by her, and give her some show of constancy and affection? Don't you owe her that at least?

NORTON. I do! And a good deal more! And I can't pay! That 's the deuce of it. That 's why I 've come to you to help me wind up the affair.

CUTLER. Had n't you better see her yourself?

NORTON. What 's the use?

CUTLER. You must come to some understanding, and perhaps — who knows? When you see her and talk to her — "On revient toujours à ses anciennes amours."

NORTON. No, not *toujours*. Sometimes — after a long ramble away from them. But in this instance — (*shaking his head*) — the proverb won't fit.

CUTLER. At any rate, see her. You can't sneak away from her without offering her some explanation of your conduct.

NORTON. Oh, as to my conduct, it 's damned bad, and there 's no explanation of it. But I don't want to sneak away. I 'm thinking how I can let her down gently. If I were to see her, I should only have a bad half-hour; she 'd have a worse. I should merely feel uncomfortable, and own I 'm a skunk. But she 'd fret her heart to pieecs, open up all the old wounds, and — poor girl!

CUTLER. Still, you 'd better meet her.

NORTON. No, I want to spare her. I have prepared her a little. I daresay she guesses, and if you were to see her and soften it as far as you can — Blackguard me as much as you like; I deserve it.

CUTLER. You do.

NORTON. She'll be far better off without me—

CUTLER. She will, undoubtedly.

NORTON. Well, that's the line to take. You know how to put it. Get her to see it in that light.

CUTLER. If she only could!

NORTON. Well, then, you'll see her?

CUTLER. No; I'll arrange for her to meet you—

NORTON. Good Lord, no! What can be the use, except to give her pain?

[*Cutler shakes his head, makes a grimace of vexation, walks about the room, takes out his watch, looks at it, puts it back, looks at Norton, who is smoking a cigarette.*

CUTLER. There's another woman?

NORTON. Well, naturally.

CUTLER. What sort of a woman? Don't tell me. I've no wish to dip my fingers in that bowl. But ask yourself. You're giving up Lora Delmar—for what? What's the bargain you've got in exchange?

NORTON. I haven't totted it up. I shan't call for the bill till I've finished the dinner. Then I daresay I shall find I've been swindled.

CUTLER. Not a very récherché meal you're sitting down to, eh?

NORTON. One gets tired of the best cooking. I fed at Garnier's once for a month on end. It drove me to a little rowdy Palais Royal restaurant.

CUTLER. With réchauffé dishes and a dirty tablecloth? You liked that?

NORTON. It was a change.

CUTLER. Change? The food was exactly the same, only coarser, staler, greasier, dirtier. Change? Lust is always the same. Intrigue is always the same. It's only a deep, enduring love that is always fresh, always varied, always new.

NORTON. Don't fancy I'm cut out for it.

CUTLER. What are you cut out for? This new treasure trove—?

NORTON. What about her?

CUTLER. Some jewel of God's fine workmanship? Something very rare, beautiful, accomplished, refined, sympathetic, eh?

NORTON. I can't say she is.

CUTLER. Take care, George. A man stamps his own character by the character of the woman he constantly pairs with.

NORTON. Mine's pretty battered. I don't think it can come to much further harm. But if it does, that's my look out.

CUTLER. What is your look out? When you tire of this *compagnon de voyage*, who's to be the next? And the next? And the next? What are your plans for middle age?

NORTON. I haven't any.

CUTLER. What's your old age going to be?

NORTON. Heaven knows. Rather doddering, I should say. You're asking me a lot of awkward questions.

CUTLER (*very kindly*). Won't you ask them yourself? Won't you look ahead?

NORTON. I'd rather not, if you don't mind. I daresay things will straighten out all right.

CUTLER. Won't you straighten them out yourself? First of all, there's your wife —

NORTON. Oh, that has straightened out of itself. Of all my *compagnons de voyage* my wife has given me the least trouble — since we separated. You know how we came to get married. I never took that seriously.

CUTLER. You did take Lora Delmar seriously?

NORTON. I suppose I did. That's the mistake of taking these affairs seriously. You only jib the more when you find they aren't.

CUTLER. Lora took it very seriously? She's taking it very seriously still?

NORTON. Yes, poor girl. Women do take these things

more seriously than men. It's a pity. Makes one feel such a beast when one has got to break it off.

CUTLER. George, think again! She has stuck to you all these years. You know what it means to her. But do you know what it means to yourself? She's the only woman who can bring you home to your best self, and make you of some little use in the world. You won't be so base, so foolish, as to throw her over?

NORTON. Looks very much like it, I'm afraid.

CUTLER. No! No! This other affair is only a passing fancy? It is n't going to last?

NORTON. I'm leaving for Italy and Egypt in the morning, so I suppose it will last through the winter.

CUTLER. Some months, then?

NORTON. For all I know it may last for some years. I'm sure I hope it may. It will save me a lot of trouble if it does.

CUTLER. And when it's over? Don't you think you'll find out the worth of Lora Delmar and come back to her?

NORTON. I might. Really, I can't say; I don't feel like it at present. In any case, I leave Charing Cross at nine to-morrow morning.

CUTLER. Cancel it, George. You aren't so tied up that you could n't get out of it?

NORTON. The tickets are taken. I'm booked till March. The only thing is to wish me *bon voyage* — unless you've got any more awkward questions?

CUTLER. Yes, just one. What attraction can a man with your bringing up, tastes, education, associations — the best that England could give a man — what attraction can you find in daily intimacy with such a woman? Don't you feel degraded, imbruted by it?

NORTON. I say, my dear old friend, with all your experience of men and women, you aren't going to take off your coat and try to mop up the sexual mess, are you?

CUTLER. No. (*He looks at Norton for a long time*

and then goes up to him and speaks very kindly and gravely.) George, you're making a fearful havoc of your life.

NORTON. Ain't I?

CUTLER. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

NORTON. If I'm not, I ought to be.

CUTLER. When you left Oxford and went into Parliament, we all had the highest hopes of you. You dropped into your uncle's seat; you had all the best training and traditions; you made your mark at once; if you'd kept at it, you'd have been one of the leaders of the party to-day.

NORTON. Getting myself horsewhipped by suffragettes; spouting party twaddle all over the country; and marching in and out of the lobbies half the night.

CUTLER. But you were born into the governing classes. That was your heritage — to govern. That was your post. You ran away from it. You're a deserter.

NORTON. I stuck to it for seven years, during which my enlightened constituents entirely disfranchised themselves by giving me Bill Bowler, the Labour king, for a colleague. Just before the nineteen-six election, as I was leaving the House, I came across Bill in the middle of a group of Labour royalties. He casually referred to me as a blanky aristocratic loafer.

CUTLER. Wasn't he about right?

NORTON. Perfectly. An admirable description of me. I couldn't have bettered it myself. Except that I was not blanky — not in any literal sense. When the election came, I saw the country was in for a blanky period of blanky legislation by blanky persons and blanky methods. So I scuttled, and left the science of government to Bill Bowler.

CUTLER. You scuttled?

NORTON. I did. And seeing the blanky muddle the blanky country has got itself into, don't you think I was very well out of it?

CUTLER. No. It is n't the time for scuttling. The Goths are upon us. They 're going to sweep away aristocratic loafers. Have no doubt about that. They 'll sweep you away. And they 'll be right. But the mischief is, they won't care what else they sweep away. In the scrimmage, they may sweep away what 's left of art and literature and architecture in our common national life; everything that has any enduring value or beauty; everything that we mean when we say "England"; everything that has made our country something different from a shrieking railway yard, surrounded by factories, and miles of squalid brick hutches for human rabbits; everything that made this land a soil to grow great men, great poets, great warriors, great seamen, great statesmen, great thinkers. What do they care what they sweep away? But they 're going to sweep you away, George — that's certain. The danger is they may sweep me away too.

NORTON. I should be sorry for that. But with all respect for you, aren't you something of an elegant superfluity?

CUTLER. No. I am the most necessary member of the social organism. I am a man of leisure.

NORTON. Well, that 's very pleasant for you. But I don't see your particular use.

CUTLER. I have tried to think for mankind. To do that, I must have ample leisure, freedom from personal cares, and easy circumstances. Then I can fulfil my function.

NORTON. Well, old friend, they don't seem to have very much need of you.

CUTLER. You think not? Look at the mad, hungry mobs of the earth, clamouring for perpetual beer and skittles. Look at the noisy gangs of politicians, voting the mobs their beer and skittles, or anything else they shout loud enough for. Darwin has lived in vain for politicians. They have never even heard of him.

How can these brass heads think for the people? How can the people think for themselves, among all the damnable clatter of their party machines? Don't they need somebody to think for them? Yes, they need me. But they don't want me. Very well. I'll step aside, and make way for my colleague.

NORTON. Who's that?

CUTLER. The man with a sword.

NORTON. Yes, I suppose Kitchener will have to look in before it's over.

CUTLER. Meantime, you're going to loaf in Egypt?

NORTON. Oh, I shall push into the interior and get some sport—

CUTLER. Sport? Won't you pull yourself together, George? Isn't it worth making an effort? If you must have a woman's companionship, what in the wide world could you wish for more than you've already got, and are throwing away? Won't you pick up your career with her; go into Parliament again; or, if the time for talking is nearly over, get ready for action? There will be plenty to do in England before long. Your grandfather lies at Lucknow — is the old spirit all gone?

NORTON. I say, you're making me feel plaguy uncomfortable. I know I'm in a bad way, and I know the country is in a bad way, but — can't you cut the preaching?

CUTLER. I've finished.

NORTON. That's right. What about dinner? You wired me to get here at seven, and so I did; but it isn't going to be all sermon pie, is it?

CUTLER. No. I've got a little dinner that you'll like.

NORTON. Good. What time?

CUTLER. Eight or thereabouts. I'm expecting another guest.

[*Looking at watch.*

NORTON. Who's that?

CUTLER. She 'll be here in a few minutes.

NORTON. She? (*Looks at him.*) Not Lora? (*Cutler does not reply.*) I say, this is too bad. You ought n't to have cornered me like this. I 'll be off before she comes.

CUTLER. No, George. She 's coming on purpose to meet you.

NORTON. It 's too bad. And it 's so rough on her. No! I 'll get away. You 'll smooth it down for her, won't you?

CUTLER (*stopping him*). No. (*Listens.*) There 's a motor just driven up. She 's here. You must see her.

[*Norton makes a gesture of intense annoyance.*

NORTON. But what 's the use? I shall pretend to make it up with her, let her think it 's all right, and then write her to-morrow.

CUTLER. No. You must n't do that.

NORTON. We shall have a beastly uncomfortable evening if I don't. Yes, that 's what I shall do.

CUTLER. No, George. That will be cruel, cowardly.

NORTON. Have you seen her?

CUTLER. Yes, this morning.

NORTON. Is she very much cut up?

CUTLER. Her heart 's breaking. I don't envy the feelings of the man who will have to remember all his life that he has broken a heart like hers.

NORTON. Well, then, why do you let me in for it to-night?

CUTLER. Why do you let yourself in? You need n't. Spare yourself; and spare her. It is n't too late.

NORTON. Infernally awkward it 's going to be for all of us.

[*Enter Sandford.*

SANDFORD (*announces*). Madame Lora Delmar.

[*Exit Sandford.*

[*Enter Lora in a soft, beautiful, quiet-toned evening dress. She is pale, excited, hopeful, anxious.*

LORA. Good-evening, dear sage.

CUTLER. Good-evening.

LORA (*to Norton*). And you —

NORTON (*goes to her, kisses her hand gracefully. His manner towards her is very charming and considerate throughout*). Ah, this is delightful.

LORA (*looking at him anxiously*). You 're pleased to see me? Of course you 'll say you are —

NORTON. And mean it, most devoutly. I 'd made up my mind for a dull evening. This old wisdom-box has been grinding out good advice to me for the last half-hour, have n't you?

CUTLER. I do preach, terribly. Coleridge left a few shreds of his mantle hereabouts, and they 've clung to my shoulders. (*Taking out watch.*) I 'll go and dress. (*To Lora.*) Oh, by the way, a young Cornish composer, by the name of Treganza, has been bothering me for a letter of introduction to you. He 's composing an opera on Fair Rosamond.

LORA. Poor creature. There are so many of them.

CUTLER. I gave him the letter. But you need n't see him. You can manage to entertain yourselves till I come down?

NORTON. Pray don't hurry. You could n't leave me in pleasanter company.

LORA (*to Cutler.*) Now, does he mean that?

CUTLER (*looks gravely at Norton*). I think he does. I feel sure he does. (*Goes to door, turns, looks at them*). I was going to preach again. I won't. But — (*speaks with considerable feeling*) — if this short life holds anything at all that is sacred, surely you two are bound to each other. Surely the ties of your attachment should bind you all the closer, because they are silken and not iron. If there is any shadow of an excuse for a love such as yours, it is because it willingly accepts deeper obligations, more lasting responsibilities than marriage itself. The summer is passing for both of you — the heyday is cooling; won't you provide for the

coming autumn? Won't you treasure up what little happiness is left for you? Get to understand each other. Find out that you are necessary to each other — and then we'll have dinner.

[*Exit Cutler.*

LORA. Tell me I've done right in coming.

NORTON. To give me three hours of your company and spare me three hours of dear old Cutler's philosophy?

LORA (*very anxiously*). You are really pleased to see me?

NORTON. Ah, you may sometimes doubt me, but you should never doubt *yourself.* (*Again kisses her hand.*) Why do you ask?

LORA. I've been in such a flutter all the afternoon. I thought perhaps you would be annoyed — and think I was forcing myself upon you.

NORTON. What happier destiny could any man have than that you should force yourself upon him? Especially in such a charming dress.

LORA. It's not a new one. You've seen it before. Don't you remember?

NORTON. No, I can't recall it. But since you were doubtless present, you will forgive me if I was so much occupied in admiring you that I had no attention to give to your dress.

LORA. And to-night you have so little attention to give to me that you can admire my dress.

NORTON. Ah, no. To-night I have so much admiration for you that it flows over upon everything that is lucky enough to be near you, or upon you.

LORA. Don't you think you are very unkind to make me pretty speeches just now?

NORTON. Aren't you a little unreasonable to present me with such a tempting subject for pretty speeches and then blame me for making them?

LORA. Don't, George; please don't. You must know that you can't deceive me by all this. (*Looks at him very reproachfully.*) You're very cruel to me.

NORTON. My dear Lora, I am ashamed to own that I could be guilty of deceiving you; but I could never be guilty of being cruel to you. (*Looking at the dress.*) Anyhow, you can't deny that the dress is exquisitely made, and even more exquisitely worn.

LORA. I put it on because I thought it might remind you of the last time you saw it.

NORTON. When was that?

LORA. Think.

NORTON. Tenby? (*She shakes her head.*) Lyndhurst? (*She shakes her head.*) Cheltenham?

[*She shakes her head, and buries her face in her hands.*

LORA. How can you bear to speak of them so lightly?

NORTON. Because I have the pleasantest recollection of them all. To look back on them makes England seem like a delightful stretch of meadow and woodland, dotted all over with lovers' trysting-places.

LORA. Some day I shall go back to them all, and put up a gravestone to the happy hours that have gone.

NORTON. I hope not. When you visit any of them again, I hope it will be to spend still happier hours, with a more deserving companion.

LORA (*with a flash of indignation*). You can say that? You can think it? I'd rather you had struck me. You have struck me. Please take it back.

NORTON. I beg your pardon. But you must own I haven't always been a very desirable companion. At Cheltenham, for instance, I scarcely spoke to you at dinner.

LORA. It was my fault. I lost my temper. I'm so sorry, George. Forgive me.

NORTON. No, forgive me. I was a brute.

LORA. You are never that.

NORTON. I was that evening.

LORA. No, you were hungry and tired, and I had kept you waiting.

NORTON. But when you appeared, you were certainly

worth waiting for. And how well you sang that evening.

LORA. That was because we had made it up.

NORTON. And how well you looked.

LORA. Did I? What was I wearing?

NORTON. Not that charming — confection.

[*Looking at her dress.*

LORA. No. I got this new for — where?

NORTON. Where?

LORA. Guess.

NORTON. Don't tease my memory any more. Tell me.

LORA. Weymouth.

NORTON. Ah, Weymouth.

LORA. Don't you remember? We went out on the water after dinner, and I wore it in the boat with my swansdown over. Don't you remember? The big moon rising over the bay — and the band in the distance playing "Tannhauser" so abominably and so splendidly — and the surly old Dorsetshire boatman — and the oars in the rowlocks — and the dancing lamps on the ripples showing us our way home — and how I slipped on the wet steps — and how you caught me tight in your arms, and I lent myself to you — I feel the thrill of it now. (*Leaning towards him.*) George, it isn't all over?

NORTON (*genuinely touched for a moment*). I have treated you badly, Lora.

LORA. That doesn't matter. We can make a fresh start. We have all the future, haven't we?

NORTON. What a cur I've been to you!

LORA. Forget it, as I've done.

[*Clasping him.*

NORTON. I wish I could. (*Withdrawing from her embrace.*) But the fact remains, I've been a selfish, careless beast. And the worse fact remains, that I'm afraid I shan't be any better in the future. You'd far better see that at once, and send me off as I deserve.

LORA. But I can't! I can't! How can you ask it, after

all that we have been to each other? Every drop of blood in me is married to a drop of yours. Think of all the dear moments, all the dear memories! They're part of me, like my arms and my feet. Aren't they part of you?

NORTON. You make me feel like a dirty scoundrel who has cheated at cards, or kicked a woman.

LORA. Well, aren't you that, if you throw me over?

NORTON. Yes, I am. But upon my word, I'm not worth making all this fuss about. Come, Lora, be sensible.

LORA (*impatiently*). Oh, be sensible! Be sensible!

NORTON. I wish there was some way in which I could make the *amende.* If you were in need of money, and I could help you; if you wanted friends or introductions. Isn't there anything I can do?

LORA. Yes, one thing.

NORTON. What's that?

LORA. Don't kick me from you.

NORTON. Well, I won't. But tell me, can't I help in your profession?

LORA. I've given it up.

NORTON. Surely not! Given up your singing? What will you do when —

LORA. When you've kicked me away from you? Die slowly, from my heart outwards.

NORTON. But I can't be saddled with this double crime. You must n't give up your singing. I've always felt so proud of your voice. And I should like to feel proud of it still.

LORA. Do you mean that?

NORTON. Indeed I do.

LORA (*becomes more animated*). I'll sing to you now. (*Going to door, opening it.*) What will you have? Do you remember the little song I sang to the urchins that day at the foot of the Saint Gotthard?

NORTON. Ah, the Saint Gotthard.

LORA. We got very near heaven that day, George?

NORTON. Six thousand feet towards it.

LORA. I'll sing you that, shall I?

(*She goes off quickly at the open door. He moves a step or two reluctantly towards the door, stops, shows great perplexity. She strikes a few chords on the piano in the next room. He looks at his watch, shows annoyance, vexation, impatience. She strikes a few more chords. He makes a step towards door, drops into a chair with disgust; knocks his fist fiercely on to his knee. She strikes a few more chords. He makes a grimace and shrug of helplessness. His face shows a sudden resolve. He smiles and nods to himself. Lora re-enters.*)

Aren't you coming?

(*Norton rises quickly, and goes to her with a show of eager affection.*)

Don't you want to hear me?

NORTON (*taking her in his arms*). Always! Always!

LORA (*responding to his embrace*). Ah! Do you mean that? Have I won you back?

NORTON. You have never lost me.

[*Embraces her. She draws him to her, kisses him passionately again and again; then bursts into tears, falls into a chair, sobbing and laughing hysterically. He stands behind her, and makes a shrug of pity and helplessness; then shows vexation as she continues sobbing.*

LORA (*getting calmer*). Don't take any notice of me. I shall be better in a moment. (*He moves a step or two behind her, looking at her, showing annoyance and impatience.*) There! (*Wiping her eyes and smiling at him through her tears.*) It's all over now. (*Still sobbing and crying a little.*) I could n't help it. (*Jumps up.*) Oh, I'm so happy!

NORTON. You see you were right. You know me better than I know myself.

LORA. Of course I do. I knew you'd come home to me. You could n't do without me for long, could you?

NORTON. I shan't try, after this.

LORA. Are you sure? Promise me. No, don't promise, because I know you wouldn't keep it. Would you? Could you?

NORTON. I won't promise this time. I'll surprise you by behaving as perfectly as the man who has the honour of being loved by you ought to behave. And if I don't quite live up to it, it's only because no man could hope to be perfect enough (*putting his arm fondly round her waist, and speaking with great tenderness*) to deserve such love as yours.

LORA. No; don't make me pretty speeches.

NORTON (*same soft, tender tone*). What, not when I mean them?

LORA. Do you mean them? Then why are you unkind to me?

NORTON. Only that I may have the pleasure of hearing you say that you forgive me.

LORA. Forgive you? I'm yours to do as you please with. Beat me, bruise me, stab me — only love me, and I'll forgive you. That's all past. Now let's talk of the future. We're going to be happier than we have ever been. Don't you feel that? I've given up my tour, so I'm quite free. Where shall we spend the winter? You said you'd like Italy and Egypt.

NORTON. Where would you like?

LORA. No, you shall choose everything for me, except the man I love; and I'll choose nothing for you, except the woman you love.

NORTON (*very tenderly*). I've chosen her myself.

LORA. And you've chosen so wisely! Now! Where shall we go? Shall it be Italy and Egypt?

NORTON. The world's end, in your company.

LORA. I'll hunt up all the routes and trains to-morrow. We'll get away from England as soon as we can, shall we? And when we come back in the spring we'll take the dearest little place in the country — somewhere in Kent, or the Surrey Hills, where we can easily get to

town, and people can easily get down to us. And you shall have your horses, and your gun, and your dogs; especially this faithful dog, who 'll follow you when you want her company; and fetch and carry; and lie down and watch you when she 's told; and sometimes steal up to you, and put her paws on your shoulder, and look at you out of her swimming eyes, and say, "Have n't you got a little love to give me, Master? I 've nothing to do all my life long but wait on you, Master."

NORTON. But you must n't give up your profession.

LORA. Yes. It takes up so much of my time and thought; rehearsing all day and singing till midnight, and having to meet people, and listen to their stupid flatteries, and go to their silly lunches and receptions, and be stared and smirked at — it's all so idiotic. It bores me till I can't bear myself. That 's why I 've often been so fretful and tiresome to you. I 've never been able to give you my best. But I will. You 'll see. It shall be so different in the days to come. I 've never really had a home; I 'm going to have one at last. You know I 'm really a home bird.

NORTON. But you must n't stop singing.

LORA. Well, I 'll sing to you whenever you want to hear me. And I 'll sing to the public — sometimes — perhaps. But not this next season. That shall be entirely yours. And listen, bad boy, you 'll never play truant from me again!

NORTON. No. I 'll never play truant from you again.

LORA. That 's right. Just keep on loving me as much as you can, and I 'll keep on loving you — a hundred times more than I can. (*Breaking from him.*) Oh, I 've never been so happy!

[*Norton looks at his watch.*

LORA. You 're thinking about dinner. It 's sure to be something you 'll like. And after dinner I 'll sing to you a little, and then — we won't stay very late. I 've ordered my motor at a quarter to eleven.

NORTON. Right. I'll get you to put me down at the Club.

LORA. At the Club?

NORTON. I've an appointment there at a quarter past eleven.

LORA. It won't keep you very long?

NORTON. I'm afraid it will — an hour at least, perhaps two.

LORA. Can't you put it off? Think — to-night, George — you might put it off for to-night.

NORTON. I can't very well get out of it.

LORA. I'll wait for you.

NORTON. No. I must n't keep you out there in the cold.

LORA. You've kept me out in the cold for a good many weeks. An hour or two longer won't much matter.

NORTON. No. You'd better drop me and go on —

LORA. You'll come?

NORTON (*after a slight hesitation*). Yes — of course.

LORA. You're sure? (*Suddenly.*) You don't mean to come!

NORTON. Yes, if I get through in anything like decent time. If I don't, I'll run round in the morning.

[*There is an awkward silence for some moments.*

LORA. This appointment? It's some very urgent business?

NORTON. Obviously. Could anything but urgent business keep me from you?

LORA. Who is it you are going to meet?

NORTON. Oh, my dear Lora, you must n't be inquisitive.

LORA. I'm not inquisitive. I've never been mean, or petty, or prying. Have I?

NORTON. Your behaviour has always been perfect and charming. (*Gracefully kissing her hand.*) I'm sure it will continue to be so. Now, shall we have a pleasant little dinner, and some music, and then you shall drop me at the Club.

LORA. No. (*She walks desperately about the room for*

a few seconds; then stops in front of him.) You're going to meet that woman. (*He does not reply.*) You're going to meet that woman. Do you deny it?

NORTON. Impossible for me to deny what a lady so confidently affirms.

LORA. After what you have said to me here a few moments ago, you are going from me to her? You are capable of that?

NORTON. I'm afraid I'm very much like the prophet Habakkuk. I am *capable de tout.*

LORA. This appointment is with her? Have you any further appointments with her? I'm not inquisitive. But six months ago you planned to spend the winter with me. You have made other plans?

NORTON. I'm sure it could n't give you any pleasure to discuss them.

LORA. No. But I want to know. All the time I have lived with you, I have never known when to trust you. Now we are parting, for once be honest with me. Tell me the truth.

NORTON. If you wish. I'm leaving Charing Cross at nine to-morrow morning. The tickets are taken, and the servants have gone on with the luggage.

LORA. Where are you going?

NORTON. Italy and Egypt.

LORA (*very quietly, very bitterly*). Italy and Egypt. Thank you. Now I know.

NORTON. That being so, what do you wish me to do? Shall I go to Cutler and make my excuses, and give him an unpleasant evening? Or would you rather I stayed and went through the dinner? I'm afraid it would n't be a very agreeable time for any of us. But I am at your service.

LORA. You're at my service?

NORTON. Now, and always.

LORA. You're at my service? No, you're at the service of anything in skirts that catches your fancy. The

dustman who carts the street rubbish from house to house is better employed than you, you scavenger! You're at my service? No, it's I who have been at your service. It's I who have crawled up to you, and begged for leave to wait on you and be your slave. For four years I have given you all, all — yes, more — that the purest and truest woman could give to the best and truest man. Oh, my God! Has ever a woman loved a man as I have loved you? Has ever a woman humbled herself as I have humbled myself to you? And for what? How have you paid me? You have always lied to me. Even when you loved me most — and you have loved me, George Norton; if there has ever been any love in that heart of yours that's been worth having, I've had it — you'll never love another woman as you have loved me — but what has your best love been worth? Even in our happiest moments, you have always been ready to trick and deceive me. Don't you think I know you? Well, I deserve to be treated as you have treated me! How else could you treat any woman? You're at my service? No, I've been at your service, and in your service for four years. I've served you faithfully, and I've got my wages. Now go to her! Say the same things to her that you've said to me. Whisper your old lies and flatteries to her. Play the same tricks on her that you've played on me. Go to her! Let her serve you as I have done, let her find you as heartless as I have done, and then — kick her from you as you have kicked me. Go to her!

[*Norton stands very quietly for some little time.*

NORTON. Believe me, I am deeply sensible of the cruel wrong I have done you. I beg your pardon, with all my heart. I am sorry our attachment — our love for each other — should end like this.

LORA. It has ended. Good-night.

NORTON. Good-bye.

[*He is going off when Cutler enters in evening dress.*

CUTLER (*cheerily*). Well, you 've come to an understanding, I hope?

NORTON. Yes. Good-night.

CUTLER. Good-night?

NORTON. Good-night.

[*Bows to Lora, and exit.*

CUTLER. One moment, George — you 're not going?

(*Exit after him.*)

(*Lora goes very quietly to chair, sits, stares hopelessly out. After a second or two Cutler enters, very slowly and sadly; he looks at Lora, who sits motionless, tearless; comes up to her, with great sympathy, puts his hand on her shoulder.*)

Poor child of the storm!

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE. *The same, on an evening in the following June. The windows on the balcony are thrown wide open. As the curtain rises, a faint flush of pink is seen along the distant horizon over the intervening wooded June landscape. The sky above is soft evening blue, with white fleecy clouds. The sunset advances and the sky darkens through the act; an orange-pink glow touches the lower clouds and gradually mounts till it compasses the higher clouds; the twilight comes on; lights dot the darkening plain; the clouds glow with a darker orange and red as the day dies down into night.*

Discover Cutler standing above the table, right, handling some sheets of manuscript. Lora in a summer dress, with a book in her hand, enters from the balcony. Her face is a little paler than in the earlier acts, and has a more settled sadness; her manner is more subdued and restrained.

LORA (*putting down the book*). Have you finished your article?

CUTLER. Not quite. It's a very large subject: "The Future of the Human Race."

LORA. That is a large subject.

CUTLER. I've nearly disposed of it. Seccombe is coming in by-and-bye to take down the last sheet and get it off to the printers. Oh, by the way, I'm expecting my little friend Mrs. Janway, and I've asked her husband to meet her. He could n't get up from Oakminster in time for dinner; so I've put it off and ordered supper instead, if you don't mind?

LORA (*has taken off her hat*). Not at all. I'm not hungry, and it seems a sin to eat in this heavenly weather.

CUTLER. I hope I shall persuade Will and Evie to stay, but I expect I shall have a pretty stiff job with him.

LORA. I'm sorry she has got herself into such trouble —

CUTLER. Foolish people must needs work out a foolish destiny.

LORA. And wise people too. We're all alike.

CUTLER. No, wise people control their destiny, as you are going to control yours. Come, now, what are you going to do?

LORA. I shall go down to North Devon for a few weeks — perhaps stay there all the summer.

CUTLER. You'd much better stay on here.

LORA. No, dear sage. You've been very kind to lend me your house, and I've enjoyed being here all this wonderful spring. But now you are home again I feel I must be moving on.

CUTLER. Nonsense! Stay on with me. It's bringing you round. Last night, when you were singing, you were quite your old self —

LORA. I don't want to be my old self.

CUTLER. Well, a new self.

LORA. No, she might turn out to be a more foolish and more unhappy creature than the old Lora. No, I don't want to be anything or anybody, but just to float on, and let life do what it likes with me, and carry me where it pleases.

CUTLER. But I can't let you drift. This new opera of Treganza's seems to have the right stuff in it, eh?

LORA. Yes — that's another reason why I must go.

CUTLER. What?

LORA. The poor boy has fallen in love with me.

CUTLER. Confound this universal amorosity that's always confounding everything else in the universe. I guessed he had. Well, you can keep him at a safe distance —

LORA. Yes. But I like him, and I don't want to be cruel to him. If I go away from him now, he'll have a bad

month or so and forget me. But if we work together on his new opera, and make it a success, he 'll only go on falling more deeply in love with me, and then — with his temperament — I might ruin his future and break his heart. And there are too many broken hearts already in the world.

CUTLER. Oh, one more won't matter very much. He 'll get over it. You must n't think of him. You must give all your thoughts to your work for a year or two, and then, if some decent, kind, sensible fellow comes your way — why not marry him?

LORA (*shakes her head sadly*). Marriage is not for me — now. If I 'd not had a voice, I might have had a home and children and friends, and a quiet heart. But now? I 'm not fitted for marriage. Oh, pity my husband, if I did marry!

CUTLER. Why?

LORA. I can't live a home life now. George Norton spoiled me for that. Or perhaps I spoiled myself before I met him. I don't think I have any real life left to live. But if I do grow out of this, and live again, I think it will be in some wild, selfish, reckless way.

CUTLER. No! No! Disordered genius? Unkempt genius? Spendthrift genius? Depraved genius? Crazy genius? No! No! Well-ordered genius! Persistent genius! Wise genius! Sane genius!

LORA. Dear sage, do let me know myself. You can't guess what depths there are here. I dare n't look at them.

CUTLER. Well, don't. Stay on here. Grow calmer and stronger every day. Steady yourself, and set to work on "Fair Rosamond" —

LORA. That might be the worst thing of all for me.

CUTLER. How?

LORA. This poor boy — he loves me, and I 'm fond of him. His bright eyes, his enthusiasm, and his love for music — he is so young — it all means so much to him —

CUTLER. But you surely aren't going to fall in love with him?

LORA. No, I don't suppose so.

CUTLER. For heaven's sake, no. Not a musician, or an artist, or an actor. Let it be a human being.

LORA. I hope it won't be anybody, for his sake, whoever he may be.

CUTLER. Why is he so much to be pitied?

LORA. I can't give him anything worth having. I had the power of constancy. I've lost it. I've lost my moorings. Anything may happen to me. I can't trust myself. If I do love again, I shall be jealous, capricious, ungovernable, unfaithful —

CUTLER. Well, then don't love again. But I suppose you will?

LORA. Yes, I daresay — after a fashion. But not as I loved George. Have you heard from him?

CUTLER (*after a slight hesitation*). Yes. There was a letter waiting for me when I got home yesterday.

LORA (*indifferently*). Where is he?

CUTLER. First of all, tell me quite truly how you feel towards him.

LORA. Not bitterly. A little tenderly and pityingly.

CUTLER. You have no love left for him?

LORA. Not a spark.

CUTLER. You 're sure of that? Your love for him is quite dead?

LORA. Quite. I could meet him almost like a stranger. What a curious mocking thing a dead love is. Like what you showed me in that old urn this morning. All the burning kisses and vows and tears — nothing but ashes; a little heap of grey ashes that were once a man. Where is George?

CUTLER. In London.

LORA. You 've seen him?

CUTLER. Yes, I left him an hour ago.

LORA. I hope he 's well and happy.

CUTLER. No. He has had a very bad time. He was taken with typhoid in Italy, and nearly died of it.

LORA. You never told me.

CUTLER. What would have been the use? You were ill yourself. That laid him up until March. He has had one or two relapses, and is still very weak and shaky.

LORA. And his parroquet?

CUTLER. She got frightened of infection, robbed him of everything she could lay her hands on, and packed off to Egypt, leaving him to die.

LORA. He needed me then.

CUTLER. Well, he just pulled through, dragged himself to Sicily, and has stayed there ever since. He only got to England on Monday.

LORA. Is he very much broken?

CUTLER. Yes, and terribly depressed. Not at all like himself. George has lost all his old pride in evil-doing. It's only healthy people who can be joyous sinners.

LORA. What's he going to do?

CUTLER. I'm afraid he's going to try to see you. (*Watching her closely.*) I told him it could be only useless and painful to you both.

LORA. Yes.

CUTLER. He's writing to you. Perhaps he'll call. You won't see him?

LORA. Yes, I think —

CUTLER. No, better not —

LORA. You need n't fear, dear sage. George has gone out of my life.

CUTLER. Well, who and what is coming into it to take his place?

LORA. Nothing at present.

CUTLER. Is Treganza coming round this evening?

LORA. Oh, yes. He's sure to. You think George will get over this?

CUTLER. Yes, but it will take some time. It has knocked him all to pieces.

LORA. I'm so sorry for him.

CUTLER (*has gone up to balcony and is looking out*). Is n't that Treganza hanging round outside the palings?

LORA. He does that every evening. He never comes in, unless I go down to the garden gate and invite him, dear foolish, chivalrous boy. I daresay he'll be there soon.

CUTLER. Ask him in, and we'll have a little more "Fair Rosamond."

LORA (*looking off*). I never grow tired of this landscape; and to-night it seems more beautiful than ever.

CUTLER. Ah, the iron old mother grows tender to us sometimes. That flush of northern sunset in the long June evenings!

LORA. What a pity the longest day will soon be here — and pass.

[*Sandford enters.*

SANDFORD (*announces*). Mrs. Janway.

[*Enter Evie. Exit Sandford.*

[*Evie is dressed in a very smart summer toilette. She looks distressed and downcast, and has the air of a martyr.*

EVIE. How d' ye do, dear Guardy?

[*Kisses Cutler.*

CUTLER. How are you, my dear?

EVIE. Madame Delmar!

[*Shakes hands with Lora.*

LORA. How d' ye do? Mr. Cutler tells me you're going to stay and have supper with us —

EVIE. Yes — I don't know — yes, I suppose.

LORA. Then we shall meet again, shan't we?

[*Goes off at balcony. Evie has thrown herself into a chair, and has begun to cry a little.*

CUTLER. Well, Evie, this is rather a sad bit of business.

EVIE. Is n't it? Did you ever know a woman so pursued by misfortune as I am?

CUTLER. Never.

EVIE. Every high and noble thing I do only brings me greater misery.

CUTLER. Our virtues betray us as often as our faults.

EVIE. Have you arranged for Will to meet me?

CUTLER. Yes. He 's coming up from Oakminster. (*Taking out watch.*) He 'll be here soon.

EVIE. You got my letter from Lucerne?

CUTLER. Yes, but it was a little disjointed —

EVIE. Can you wonder, considering the awful state I was in?

CUTLER. Tell me exactly how it happened. Your first letters from Tarasp were so cheerful. You seemed to have settled down so comfortably with Miss Lambert and Karlinski.

EVIE. Yes, so we did. Of course I had no idea of the dreadful reputation Karlinski had.

CUTLER. As a violinist?

EVIE. No, as a — He has had love affairs with everybody.

CUTLER. Busy creature! But you and Miss Lambert were staying at the other hotel?

EVIE. Yes, but I 've since found out that he had an affair with her.

CUTLER. Quite an affairist, it seems.

EVIE. Yes, and at his own hotel there was a Mrs. Berriman — I 'm almost sure — and a tall, light-haired woman —

CUTLER. Are these things possible in the High Alps? And do the Eternal Heavens look down unmoved?

EVIE. Guardy, you might be serious for once, when you see the terrible position I am in.

[*Crying.*

CUTLER. I 'm sorry, my dear. Tell me the rest of it.

EVIE. Well, it was all a carefully planned scheme between Mary Lambert and Karlinski to get hold of my money.

CUTLER. Sort of three-card trick, eh?

EVIE. Yes. It was Karlinski who advised me to take Mary Lambert out to Switzerland with me to train my voice. They knew I was divorcing Will, and that Will was making me a handsome settlement. So they planned that Karlinski should marry me for the sake of my fortune.

CUTLER. Les affaires sont les affaires.

EVIE. They thought, of course, when they got me out there, that I should be persuaded to accept Karlinski. But when they found I was determined to live for art alone, they had to try another plan.

CUTLER. What was that?

EVIE. We stayed on at Tarasp till the end of March.

CUTLER. They attending to their own "affairs," and you training your voice —

EVIE. Yes. And I wrote a small volume of poems. I'll show them to you some day.

CUTLER. Thank you. Poems? You were well on your way to your great future.

EVIE. Yes, and if it had n't been for my generous confiding nature, I should have realised it. For I have got it in me, have n't I? (*He does not reply.*) I 'm sure I have. I 'm sure I have.

CUTLER. Well, you trained your voice?

EVIE. Yes, and it developed splendidly. You 've no idea what my voice has become — quite a rich, powerful organ. So I decided to give a concert. That gave Mary Lambert and Karlinski their chance.

CUTLER. Chance of what?

EVIE. Of getting me into their power. They had a lot of musical friends at Davos; so they persuaded me to give the concert there. They went on to arrange it, leaving me to follow in a few days. Mary Lambert had begged me to lend her my maid, as there was so much to do for the concert. So I had to go on to Davos alone. When I got just beyond Sus, there was a heavy snowstorm, and I was forced to take shelter in a wretched,

dirty little inn at the top of the pass. The next day Karlinski came on to fetch me to Davos. But it snowed worse than ever, and his horses broke down — at least he said so. So he pretended he must stay on at the inn. Of course he had planned it all.

CUTLER. He could scarcely have planned the snowstorm.

EVIE. No, but he ought to have fought his way out of it, to save my reputation. Instead of that, he stayed; and there I was, shut up in that dreadful hole with Karlinski for over a fortnight, and nobody within miles, except the dirty innkeeper and his dirty fat wife, and the chickens.

CUTLER. Art demands heavy sacrifices from her victims.

EVIE. Oh, please don't. Can't you see what a terrible situation I was in? Karlinski would keep on making love to me. I put myself under the protection of the dirty landlady, but she only laughed at me, and pretended to think I was married to Karlinski. Of course Karlinski had bribed them.

CUTLER. Could n't you possibly get through?

EVIE. No, the roads were quite blocked. And Mary Lambert kept on advertising the concert, with Karlinski for my accompanist. When we did get down to Davos, I did n't want to give the concert, but they said all the tickets were taken, and I must keep faith with the public. Well, the night came and the room was crammed. I had caught a dreadful cold on the pass, but still I sang splendidly — considering I had lost my high notes. But there was n't any applause, scarcely a hand.

CUTLER. Ungrateful brutes, the public.

EVIE. No. They appreciated me, but they did n't applaud.

CUTLER. Held themselves in, eh? Why did they do that?

EVIE. Because Mary Lambert put it about the hotel that Karlinski and I were engaged, and that I was going to marry him as soon as I got my divorce. I found that everybody had been talking about me; and the next day

the best people in the hotel would n't speak to me. Can you imagine anything more dreadful?

CUTLER. What did you do?

EVIE. I explained to them that there was nothing between Karlinski and me — absolutely nothing; but I could see they did n't believe me. Karlinski and Mary Lambert tried to persuade me that the only thing to do was to let Will make Karlinski co-respondent in the divorce case, and then he would marry me. Of course I refused, and got away to Lucerne. There I happened to meet the Pumphreys. I told them what had happened, and they took me in. Then I wrote a full account of it to Will, but he only wrote a cold, heartless letter. And now he won't have anything to do with me. [*Whimpering.*

CUTLER. How did it get into the papers?

EVIE. Karlinski must have sent paragraphs all round, thinking it would force me to marry him. Will must contradict the papers at once.

CUTLER. It 's a dangerous thing to contradict newspapers. They always have the last word.

EVIE. But who is to defend my reputation? I can't defend it myself. Somebody must defend it. Surely it 's my husband's duty to defend my reputation.

CUTLER. But, my dear Evie, you are getting a divorce.

EVIE. No, I 'm not.

CUTLER. You 're not?

EVIE. I can't have a divorce now. Naturally, I don't want one. I 've instructed my lawyers to withdraw my petition.

CUTLER. But Will seems anxious to go on.

EVIE. He can't. I 've taken it off the list. Guardy, you must see that I can't go about the world alone, with this disgrace hanging over me. The only possible thing for me to do now is to go back to Oakminster as Will's wife. That will convince everybody I am quite innocent.

CUTLER. But Will does n't seem very much inclined to take you back.

EVIE. Oh, but he must. He knows that I have behaved quite properly throughout. You know it, Guardy, don't you? You 're sure of it?

CUTLER. Quite sure, my dear.

EVIE. Then why should n't he take me back? Surely it 's his duty as my husband to stand by me. Especially as I 've been trapped into this awful position through no fault of my own. I could n't have avoided it, could I?

CUTLER. Only by remaining at Oakminster as his wife, instead of flying off to the High Alps.

EVIE. But then I should have had to sacrifice my whole artistic career. And because I dared to follow the highest that was in me, I find all the hotel visitors cutting me, and everybody believing that I 'm not a good woman. Guardy, why are things like that allowed to happen?

CUTLER. The monstrously unfair treatment that Providence deals out to deserving people is fully discussed in the Book of Job. The only conclusion reached there is the violently improbable one of a happy ending.

EVIE (*sobbing*). If it had been my own fault, I could have borne it —

[*Exit Sandford.*

SANDFORD. Mr. Janway is in the next room, sir.

CUTLER. Show him in.

SANDFORD. I mentioned that Mrs. Janway was with you, and he asked me to tell you that he wishes to see you alone.

CUTLER. Very well, Sandford. I 'll be there in a minute.

[*Exit Sandford.*

EVIE. You see! He won't even do me the bare justice to see me, and hear my story.

CUTLER. You have quite made up your mind not to have a divorce?

EVIE. Quite. So he must take me home with him. He

can't divorce me now that he has taken some person to Brighton, and given my lawyers the evidence. You might point that out to him.

CUTLER. I suppose I may tell him that if he does take you back, you 'll do everything you can to make him comfortable, and the home happy?

EVIE. Of course I shall. I always have sacrificed myself to his wishes, when they have n't interfered with my sense of what is clearly due to myself.

CUTLER (*going off*). We 'll hear what Will has got to say.

EVIE (*bursts into fresh tears*). Guardy, why is it that I am always singled out for unhappiness and misfortune?

[*Cutler shrugs his shoulders and goes off. Evie continues crying. Lora enters at window and comes down towards Evie.*

LORA (*seeing that Evie is crying*). I beg pardon.

[*Is going off.*

EVIE. No, please don't go.

LORA (*coming back to her*). Can I help you at all?

EVIE. No, thank you. At least — I suppose you have heard of my undeserved trouble?

LORA. Mr. Cutler has given me a few particulars. I 'm very sorry. I hope it will all come right.

EVIE. Yes, but even if it does, my artistic career is utterly ruined for the time. Who knows? I may never be able to show the world what I have in me. (*Looking enviously at Lora.*) Oh, what triumphs you 've had! You have been lucky.

LORA. Have I?

EVIE. Well, have n't you? Your pictures are in all the shop windows; and they write to you for your autograph; and you get columns of praise in all the papers whenever you appear. You 've had nothing but one long round of success and happiness.

LORA. You think I 've been happy?

EVIE. Well, if you have n't, you ought to have been. Really it seems to me that some women are never satisfied. Look how different my life has been from yours.

LORA. I hope so.

EVIE. What do you mean? You must be very hard to please.

LORA. I don't think you 'd say that, if you knew what my life has been.

EVIE. Tell me. I 've often wished to question you. Do tell me —

LORA. No, it 's not worth telling.

EVIE. Yes, do, please. It may be a guide to me in my own career when I take it up again.

LORA. You 're going on with your music?

EVIE. Yes, I 'm fondest of that. But just now I can't decide. I may devote myself to poetry, or painting. There are so many objectionable things and people connected with music — especially for a woman, aren't there?

LORA. Yes. I would n't risk it if I were you. You would n't if you knew what I 've gone through.

EVIE. What have you gone through? Tell me. I should be so grateful. Of course I don't want to know your private life —

LORA. Oh, I don't mind your knowing. There is nothing in my private life that is n't known to somebody who is no more to me than you are.

EVIE. Then do tell me.

LORA (*looks at her very pityingly for a while*). Yes, it might be a guide to you.

EVIE. Where were you brought up?

LORA (*speaking all through in a quiet, passionless, matter-of-fact tone, without any trace of self-pity*). In Halligan's menagerie. I never saw my father. My mother was called Signora Gianelli, the renowned lion-tamer. One of the first things I remember was her coaxing me to stroke a lion's neck.

EVIE. And did you?

LORA. Yes. They were well fed and harmless. She was plucky and healthy and handsome, with Italian blood in her. She gave me her pluck. I've scarcely ever known fear.

EVIE. How delightful that must be!

LORA. She did n't earn very much, so when I was six, she took me into the cage with her. They brought out a large yellow and red poster of my mother, with her foot on a lion's neck, and me in her arms. That was on all the walls of the towns we visited. So you see I've always been used to that kind of fame. That's the reason I don't think much of it now.

EVIE. But it must have been very exciting.

LORA. No; it was everyday work. I suppose I was an attractive child, for when I was ten they put me outside at every performance, to dance, and make a speech inviting the crowd to come in. I liked that, because I had a red-velvet spangled dress, and everybody noticed me. I had to speak up. That gave my voice its power. There was always the crowd, and the music, and the flaring lamps. I did that for three years. If ever I've been happy in my life, it was then.

EVIE. You had to mix with a lot of common people?

LORA. I had to mix with human nature. I had to put up with a good deal at times, and listen to bad language and coarse jests. But I took no notice of it, and the menagerie people were kind and hard-working, and quite respectable.

EVIE. How very interesting!

LORA. One night at Gloucester a dear old lady stopped and talked to me. She asked my mother and me to her house. In the end she took me away from the menagerie, and sent me to a fashionable boarding-school at Eastbourne.

EVIE. I wondered how it was that you are so — so refined.

LORA. Am I refined? The girls at the school made my

life a hell to me. I was n't of their class; they scarcely spoke to me, except to taunt me, and mimic my bad manners. But I was quick, and I soon learned to talk and behave like them. And I had music and singing lessons. But, oh, the misery of that time! After two years I ran away, back to my mother and the menagerie. I tried to take up that life again, but I could n't. I hated it. Then, one night, Stanley, the tame old lion, got angry, and nearly tore my mother to pieces. She just escaped with her life, but she was a wreck, and fit for nothing.

EVIE. What did you do then?

LORA (*very quiet all through*). Starved. Starved. Starved. For four years my mother and I starved together. I've sung and danced in the streets. I've sung and danced at race-meetings. I've sung and danced in public-houses. Then my mother died, and I got an engagement in the chorus of a provincial opera company. The next two or three years I only half-starved. I married a careless good-for-nothing, a weak brute, who took my salary, and got drunk and tortured me. I left him, and took up with other men — I don't know who, I don't remember — what does it matter? They were nothing to me, though I lived with them. Some of them were kind, and good comrades. But they were no more than chance acquaintances. I took up with them, because I was quite hopeless of ever getting out of it — they were part of it all — dirty lodging-houses, dirty meals, dirty theatres, dirty dresses; nights in trains; salaries not paid; no future, nothing to live for — just hurried, helpless getting through from day to day.

EVIE. I had no idea what that kind of life was like. It must have been very disagreeable.

LORA. But I worked hard all the while, though I had n't the least hope. I knew I had a voice. So have many singers in the street. I never expected to get a hearing. You think I've been successful? For years I had noth-

ing but failure, failure, failure, disappointment, disappointment, disappointment. But I worked on. Then Lewis Gordon sent out a new opera company to tour the provinces. I got an engagement for small parts. He took a great deal of notice of me. I saw that I had attracted him. In the vacation he sent me to Berlin and Dresden, to study under good masters. How I worked then! When I came back in the autumn, there was another woman in the company — Ella Raymond. She could sing too; and she did all she could to get hold of Lewis Gordon. It was a neck-and-neck race between her and me, for Gordon and the public. How that woman and I hated each other! We quarrelled and almost fought on the stage. We did every mean thing we could think of to get the better of each other, and put each other wrong with the audience. I saw it was to be her or me. I determined it should be me. It was my only chance. I got hold of Lewis Gordon, and I downed her. Yes, I crushed her. She had to leave the company, and she never got another good engagement. Then I was sorry for her. She fell ill, poor creature. I can't tell you what I suffered for what I had done to her. I made her a good allowance that kept her comfortably. When I could, I nursed her; and she died kissing me and calling me her only friend. You're shocked and surprised at all this?

EVIE. Do, please, go on.

LORA. I kept on working. I got on very well with Lewis Gordon. He was an educated man and a gentleman. But he had n't any character, and I could n't love him. Just then, if I had met a man whom I could love, I'd have easily died for him. We drifted away from each other; and he found another attachment. He got tired of losing money, and gave up the company. Then I got an engagement at Covent Garden. I made a great success in a small part, and the next day I met a man whom I could love. That was the first time I had really

loved. I did n't know I had it in me to love a man as I loved him. And now I don't know why it was. It is n't good women who can give a man the most unselfish devoted love. They are faithful, without knowing what faithfulness means. It 's such as I who can be faithful to a man. And I was faithful. I did love him. That made me sing. Then they found out I had a voice. I made success after success. I could n't help it. It was all so easy.

EVIE. Surely you were happy then?

LORA. No. I was never sure of him for a moment. It was I who loved him. He loved me too in a way, but I kept the bank of our love. I stood to lose. I had rages and torments of jealousy, I was never free from it. Very often my happiness with him was misery, worse than misery itself. I never knew how I could suffer till then. No, it was n't happiness. It was fever. Happy? I 've been happy, as a drunkard is happy. But real sure happiness? I 've never had a day of it in my life. I don't know what it means. Now you know all about me. [*She has spoken very quietly throughout, as if telling the history of another person.*

EVIE. Thank you for telling me all this. It must have been very painful to speak of.

LORA (*indifferent*). No, it 's past. It does n't mean much to me now. But you know what I have had to go through, to be what I am. Do you think it 's worth while to risk it?

EVIE. No, you 've quite decided me against music. I shall give myself entirely to poetry. I have written enough poems to make a small volume —

LORA. Would n't it be better to give yourself entirely to your home and husband? You have a chance, such as I have never had. (*Very enviously.*) You may have a child —

EVIE. I 'm not fond of children. And they would interfere —

[*Cutler looks in at the door.*

CUTLER. Evie, will you come this way a moment?

[*Exit Cutler, leaving the door open.*

EVIE. Thank you so much. What you have told me will be such a guide to me. I'm so much obliged to you.

[*Exit Evie. Lora looks after her very pityingly; then dismisses her with a little helpless movement, and goes out on to the balcony; stands there watching the setting sun; waves her hand and beckons to some one in the garden.*

LORA (*calling off*). Good-evening. Yes, come up!

[*John Treganza joins her on the balcony. He is a bright-eyed, swarthy, handsome young Cornishman of twenty-five; with a contagious earnestness and excitement; a deep voice, with a slight West Country accent; joyous, animated, hopeful, alert. He has some sheets* of *music in his hand. They come into the room.*

JOHN. You don't mind my coming round?

LORA. No, I'm pleased. How have you been getting on?

JOHN. Splendidly. I've been out in the woods all the afternoon, working like a steam engine. I can't stop myself. I've got Rosamond's song at last. It has been buzzing in my head all day. And I know if you'll let me be with you for a quarter of an hour, I can go out and score it down right off. Give me a quarter of an hour.

[*Looks at her with the most ardent love and longing.*

LORA. An hour, if you like. We're having a late supper to-night; and Mr. Cutler wants you to come in and try some of the numbers.

JOHN. Yes, but I must get down Rosamond's song first. Let me be with you and talk to you.

[*His eyes are fixed greedily upon her.*

LORA. Very well. Tell me some more about your boy days.

JOHN. No, let me talk about you; because I don't seem to have had any life before I met you. Ah, you don't

know! The first time I heard you sing at Covent Garden! I went home just like a madman. I walked all the way to Norwood. It was moonlight, and London was like a fairy city. I came up the next night you sang. I never missed a single performance all the season. I used to wait outside the gallery door from three o'clock, and I always got the middle front seat. I clapped and shouted all through, and at the end I stayed and brought you on time after time. Then I used to go round to the stage door, and wait till you came out, and run after your motor till I could n't breathe —

LORA. Poor boy!

JOHN. No, no. There never was anybody so happy as I was — as I am.

[*Looking at her.*

LORA. Now we've had enough about me. Let's talk about yourself.

JOHN. No, there's only you in all the world.

[*Approaches as if to embrace her.*

LORA. You won't make love to me, will you?

JOHN. Yes. Don't turn away from me. Let me love you! I don't want you to love me, if you can't. But let me love you. That will be enough.

LORA (*gently pushing him from her, going away from him*). Tell me about the old church and the organ — and your mother.

JOHN. She used to say, "Now, Jan, my sonny boy, daun't 'ee be vulish weth thase heere music. 'T ez oal very well, Jan, but thee 've got thy living to make, Jan." And then I used to go to the old church, up to the organ-loft, and play till it was dark, and when I got back to supper she 'd say, "Thee'm maazed weth thase heere music, Jan. 'T will send thee into the county 'sylum up to Bodmin, Jan." And I used to say, "I caent help ut, Mother." And then one night she gave in and said: "'T ez no gude arguing weth 'ee, Jan. If

'tez to be, 'tez to be, and so God bless 'ee, Jan." (*Approaching her.*) I wish you'd call me "Jan." Won't you? Do! Only once!

LORA (*very tenderly*). Jan!

JOHN. Ah!

[*He tries to clasp her, but she gently repulses him.*

LORA. No. I've told you that you must n't make love to me. Listen, Jan. Your mother 's dead. I'd like to be your mother, just for ten minutes. Will you let me? And will you hear what I have to say, quite patiently and quietly?

JOHN. Yes.

LORA (*putting her hand very affectionately on his arm*). If I were your mother, I'd say to you, "You 're going to be very successful, Jan. Perhaps you 'll make a great name in music. And you 're going to be praised, and flattered, and made much of. You must n't think too much of that. It means so little. But you know that; because, you know, the only praise that 's worth having is the praise that our own heart whispers to our own ear, when we are sure we have struck the right note."

JOHN. Yes, I know that.

LORA. So you 'll keep your head when popular success comes, won't you, my sonny boy? And you 'll have your failures and disappointments — bitter ones, perhaps. They 're good, too. They teach us. You 'll make your failures help you, won't you, Jan?

JOHN. Yes, but I could n't fail if only you 'd care for me a little.

[*Looks at her with very great longing.*

LORA. You promised you 'd hear me. Yes (*looking at him very tenderly and wistfully*), you 'll be successful and famous, perhaps, and the world will pet you and take you up. And you 'll be loved, Jan, by many women.

JOHN. I only want to be loved by you.

LORA. You 'll be loved by many women —

JOHN. But I can never love any woman but you.

LORA (*shakes her head*). You'll love many women. Your own mother would n't have spoken to you like this. She did n't know the world that you're going to live in. I do know it. Don't let it spoil you, Jan. Don't let women spoil you. You'll have to love them; and (*looking at him very sadly*) perhaps they'll master you, and eat away all the freshness from your work, and break your heart.

JOHN. There's only one woman who can break my heart.

LORA. There are many. (*Looking at him very tenderly.*) Oh, it will be a pity!

JOHN. What?

LORA. If you don't reach the best of all. But you will, won't you, Jan? You'll be loved many times, and have much trouble with it all; but perhaps, some day, you'll find the one woman who can give you all her heart, all herself.

JOHN (*passionately*). Can't you?

LORA. I can't. But some woman will. You'll know her when you meet her. Treat her very tenderly; be faithful to her; guard her love — it's a great possession. If there is anything worth guarding and cherishing on earth, that's it. Remember what I've said, Jan. And God bless 'ee, my sonny boy!

JOHN (*imploringly*). Can't you love me?

LORA (*shakes her head sadly*). I'm not fitted for such a love as you have to give. I'm not worthy of it. I might not be faithful to you — even if I could grow to love you.

JOHN. But you could grow to love me — you shall!

LORA. Not now, Jan. Don't press me.

JOHN. You don't love any one else?

LORA. No.

JOHN. Your heart is free?

LORA. My heart is dead, I think.

JOHN. I'll bring it back to life. I'll make you love me.

LORA. Ah, no, Jan. For your own sake, don't try. Sup-

pose I could love you, what could it mean for both of us? I'm much older than you.

JOHN. You've many years of love to give to some one. Give it to me.

LORA. I would n't be so cruel to you.

JOHN. It would be the best thing Heaven could give me. What is your future going to be without love?

LORA. My future? Don't speak of it. I have n't any.

JOHN. Yes, with me. You're going to sing my Rosamond?

LORA. Yes, I suppose.

JOHN. Won't you promise?

LORA. Yes, if you'll promise not to make love to me.

JOHN. I won't make a promise, because I know I could n't keep it. But if you don't sing it, you will break my heart.

LORA. I won't do that.

JOHN (*after a pause*). Give me one kiss!

LORA. Ah, no, don't ask me.

JOHN. Yes, one. I can do Rosamond's song then. Only one. I'll not ask for another till you give it me of your own free will — after our great success.

LORA. You'll swear that?

JOHN. I swear it. Give me one kiss.

LORA. You are not to kiss me.

[*She kisses him very quietly and tenderly on his cheek.*

JOHN. Now I can do it! I'll run round to the little inn parlour, and score it down right away. (*Snatching up his music.*) I'll be back with it done. (*On balcony.*) Come down to the gate with me, won't you?

[*She joins him on balcony and they go off together. Will Janway and Cutler enter. Will flings himself into an arm-chair, evidently disgusted and annoyed. Cutler turns up the electric lights.*

WILL. Well, this is a confounded pretty state of affairs, is n't it? And after I had faked up that beastly three days at Brighton.

CUTLER. Your Brighton excursion, like misconduct generally, seems to have been largely superfluous.

WILL. And the only time the lady and I showed up together on the front, we ran straight into the Oakminster curate, and he would stop and talk. Of course I had to introduce the lady as my cousin. Well, the curate is a champion idiot, but he was n't idiot enough to believe that; especially as the lady did n't look like a genuine cousin, or a genuine anything, except a genuine what-she-was. So the curate fished out my hotel, and made inquiries; and when he got back to Oakminster, he began talking about it. It got all over the town, and the vicar called to lecture me. Well, I could n't stand his rowing, so he has made it pretty hot for me all round. Pumphrey is his churchwarden, and the Pumphreys have cut me. And I tell you, just at present Oakminster does n't regard me as a highly moral character.

CUTLER. Never mind that, while you can so regard yourself. As doubtless you can, and do.

WILL. Well, I don't know about being very moral; but I have been jolly badly used.

CUTLER. Don't think me curious; but the last six months, how have your feminine relationships been — shall I say "functioning"?

WILL. Ghastly.

CUTLER. You left here last November, intending to make a damned fool of yourself with some unknown fair.

WILL. I did n't intend — in fact, I intended to avoid it — as far as possible.

CUTLER. It was not possible. What happened? Don't give me any particulars, but just a general impression.

WILL. Well — oh, well — I 'm hanged if I know exactly what has happened. Heaps of things I don't want to remember. It has been another silly mess-up. I don't know — I want to go straight — I 'm pretty sick of it.

CUTLER. Then you don't contemplate your behaviour the last six months with unmingled pride and satisfaction?

WILL. No, I'm hanged if I do. Anything but. I'm hanged well ashamed of myself. Though, under the circumstances, I don't see that I could have acted any differently.

CUTLER. Suppose you separate from Evie, will you be able to — pardon me using your own words — will you be able to shun the destiny of again making a damned fool of yourself? What do you propose to do now?

WILL. I don't *propose* to do anything. But I know jolly well what I *shall* do, if I'm left to myself.

CUTLER. With that modest estimate of your moral stability, would n't it be better to make it up with Evie?

WILL. I don't see what else I can do. Because you see the Pumphreys and most of my old friends at Oakminster are cutting me, by the vicar's orders. And Evie met the Pumphreys in Switzerland and got round them, and persuaded them I've treated her very badly. And if I don't take her back, the Pumphreys are going to invite her down to Oakminster to stay with them. And she'll make everybody believe that I'm a brute and that she's a martyr. Pleasant outlook, eh?

CUTLER. I'm afraid you 'll have to take her back.

WILL. I suppose I shall. (*Breaks out wrathfully.*) How the deuce do women expect to be treated? How is a man to treat them?

CUTLER. After thirty, the philosopher treats them as a side issue in life.

WILL. A side issue?

CUTLER. God took Eve from under Adam's ribs as a profound symbol that man should always regard woman as a side issue.

WILL. But they won't let you regard them as side issues. I can tell you one thing — what with Evie and the vicar, and the Oakminster people generally, I'm not going to enjoy myself.

CUTLER. Endurance, not enjoyment, is man's pass-key through this world. Throw yourself heart and soul into

your business; stick to your work; be kind and forbearing with Evie; humour her as much as you can; consult her wishes, and receive her friends; put her in her right position, and keep her there.

WILL. What on earth is a woman's right position? Will you please tell me that?

CUTLER. When the buoyant Panurge went to Dodona to seek counsel in matrimony — Rabelais does n't mention this, but it 's authentic — Panurge asked the oracle, "What is woman's rightful position?" The oracle replied, "Put her above you, she is still beneath you. Put her beneath you, she is still above you. Put her on a level with you, and together you sink into sub-bottomless chaos."

WILL. I wish some oracle would tell me what to do with Evie. I suppose I shall have to take her back.

CUTLER. If you do, you 'll have the satisfaction, denied to most husbands who take their wives back, of knowing that she has behaved herself with perfect propriety during her absence from you.

WILL. I suppose there is no doubt about that?

CUTLER. Not the least.

WILL. Well, that 's something —

[*Sandford enters with a little note.*

SANDFORD (*giving it to Will*). Mrs. Janway asked me to give you this, sir.

[*Will takes the note and reads it. Exit Sandford.*

WILL (*having read note, shows great disgust*). What do you think? She has gone to get her luggage, says she 'll bring it to my rooms at the Lancaster. (*With great disgust.*) I shall find her there waiting for me.

CUTLER. There, you see, matrimonial problems solve themselves, if we only allow them.

WILL. They know me so well at the Lancaster. I can't turn her out and have a row —

CUTLER. Is it ever worth while to have a row with, or about, a woman?

WILL. I suppose she 'll hang on to her artistic tomfoolery.

CUTLER. I should let her. It will leave you free to make carpets.

WILL. Then there 's her confounded lawyer's bill for the divorce. I shall have to pay up.

CUTLER. To pay up is a token of masculinity, like a stag's antlers. They can't deprive us of that.

WILL (*desperately*). I've a jolly good mind to —

CUTLER. To do what?

WILL (*with a gesture of despair*). I dunnow —

[*Enter Sandford, and announces Mr. Norton. Enter George Norton. Exit Sandford.*

[*Norton is much changed in manner — he is pale and languid, as if recovering from a long weakening illness. His pallor and the sharpness of his features make him even more handsome and distinguished.*

CUTLER. Oh, George, I scarcely expected you.

NORTON. I hope you don't mind. How d' ye do, Janway?

WILL. How are you?

[*Shaking hands.*

NORTON. Just turning the corner, after a bad bout of typhoid. You 're looking well.

WILL. I 'm splendid.

NORTON. How 's Mrs. Janway?

WILL. Oh, she 's capital, thanks.

NORTON. Give her my kind regards.

WILL. I will. (*To Cutler.*) I 'll ring you up in the morning.

CUTLER. Do. Bring Evie here to dinner to-morrow night. (*Shaking hands.*) My young friend Treganza shall give you some bits out of his new opera, " Fair Rosamond."

WILL. Thanks. Evie 's fond of music. Well, I 'll be getting back to her.

[*Cutler sees him off and closes door after him.*

CUTLER. This is too bad of you, George.

NORTON. I could n't stick it in those rooms all the evening. So I thought I'd come up and see her.

CUTLER. No, George. She has only just pulled round, after months of terrible weakness and depression. I can't let you upset her, and throw her back again.

NORTON. I won't upset her. I'll only just see her and get her answer.

CUTLER. No —

[*Lora appears on balcony and comes in. She has a little shock of surprise, and then comes down to him very simply and kindly; holds out her hand.*

LORA. George —

[*He takes her hand, bends over it, kisses it tenderly.*

NORTON. Cutler is n't giving me a very warm welcome, and I was rather afraid you might order me off the premises.

LORA. You know I would n't do that.

[*She cannot help showing that she is moved; goes away from him, stands apart.*

CUTLER. Now, George! Just say, "How d' ye do?" and "Good-bye" —

NORTON. No; I must have a few minutes with her alone. (*To Lora.*) You won't refuse me?

CUTLER. But I must.

LORA. No. (*To Cutler.*) It will be best. Yes, please.

CUTLER (*after showing hesitation*). I shall be back in three minutes.

[*Exit Cutler.*

LORA. You 've been ill. I 'm so sorry. (*Looking at him searchingly.*) You 've been very ill?

NORTON. Yes, I had a very near shave. Twice I was all but gone — they did bring me a priest — upon my word, I was half inclined to give him a job. If I 'd got a little more dotty, I believe they would have smuggled me into the Church.

LORA. But you 're better now — you 'll soon be well. You have a splendid constitution.

NORTON. I had a splendid constitution, but this has knocked it to bits. Oh, I shall come round, but I 've got

to go through months of infernal "blues." Good Lord! it isn't living! It's just hanging on in this rotten world, and wishing I was out of it. I've had my revolver taken away for fear I might use it.

LORA. You won't think of that?

NORTON. No, I daresay I shall hang on; though I don't see why I should. I'm no use to myself or any one else, and I'm as weak as a starved rat.

LORA. Poor fellow!

NORTON. Oh, I deserve it. Well, you've got your revenge, haven't you?

LORA. I never wished for that. Even now, if there were anything I could do to help you, I'll do it.

NORTON. Well, there's nobody living who can help me out of this hole except you. But I don't like to ask you.

LORA. What could I do?

NORTON. I've treated you worse than any man ever treated a woman. Will you forgive me, if I offer you the last and worst insult, and ask you to marry me?

LORA. I couldn't do that, George. It wouldn't help you, and it wouldn't mean anything to me — now.

NORTON. You don't care for me any longer?

LORA. I don't love you any longer. You killed my love in this room last November. Don't let us speak about it.

NORTON. You must have suffered horribly.

LORA. I was just numbed for months, just dead. I suppose I felt it so much, that I scarcely felt it at all. I went through all those months as if I were somebody else. Mr. Cutler took a furnished house for me in the next road, and did all he could. Then he went abroad, and I came here. I've gradually come to life again these last few weeks, and it has been so strange to find that I don't love you. It all seems so curious and far away, like a picture that somebody else has painted — and it's my own past life, and my love for you.

NORTON. It hasn't all gone, Lora?

LORA. Quite. There's nothing so dead as a dead love, is

there? Believe me, George, nothing can bring back my love for you. I'm so sorry — for your sake, so sorry!

NORTON. What a fool I've been? How you loved me!

LORA. Yes, and it was all so useless, so wasted; we were like children who found a heap of diamonds, and thought they were pebbles, and threw them away into the mud.

NORTON. Won't you give me another chance, Lora? I know I'm a lame duck just now, but the doctors say I shall pick myself out of this, and be as good a man as ever I was.

LORA. Yes, you'll come to life again, as I am doing; and then you'll find, as you did before, that I'm not very much to you —

NORTON. You needn't remind me what a skunk I was to you.

LORA. I didn't mean to hurt you. But when you get well, you won't be quite the same; things will change with you, as they have changed with me; you'll only wonder at the past, and not feel it. And you'll meet some other woman who will love you —

NORTON. God help her, poor wretch, if I do. I shall make a pretty bad catch for any woman. I should make a pretty bad catch for you. I don't pretend I'm offering you anything that's worth having. But I wouldn't treat you as I did — I can promise that.

LORA. Don't ask me, George; it's impossible.

NORTON. You haven't made any other plans?

LORA. No, I have no plans.

NORTON. Won't you give me a trial? I've seen my wife's solicitors, and she will agree to a divorce. So I shall be quite free. I'm offering to marry you because I want to show you that I'm ready to start on fresh lines; and you'll always have that claim on me —

LORA. What claim? I didn't hold you by love. How could I hope to hold you by marriage?

NORTON. That's true. But it would give you a position —

LORA. What position? What position has your wife had all these years?

NORTON. I 've never worried her — she has been quite free to do as she likes.

LORA. I don't want that position.

NORTON. And you know I never loved her.

LORA. You did love me?

NORTON. Yes, but I never found out how much till these last few months, since I 've been on my back. And I 've got months of it yet. Every time the clock ticks I feel I must dash something at it, and stop it. But it ticks and ticks; and I lie there and think and think — That first season of yours at Covent Garden, our first drive down to Richmond —

LORA. Don't, George — ah, please don't —

NORTON. No, it 's not fair on you. Well, here I am, on my beam-ends, knocked into a cocked hat; I never was worth your caring for, and I never shall be. But won't you give me another chance?

LORA (*shakes her head*). Don't press me. It would be such a terrible mistake for both of us.

NORTON. It would be a terrible mistake for you. But it 's the only thing that would make life worth having for me. (*She shakes her head.*) I daresay you 're right. I 'm such a crock —

LORA. Oh, I can't bear to see you so weak and helpless. If I were sure it would make you well and happy, I think I could bring myself to it —

NORTON. And you will? That 's like you, Lora! You are a jewel!

[*Cutler has entered.*

CUTLER (*after a look at them*). Now, George. You 're an invalid. It 's time you were safely in bed —

NORTON. No, I 'm going to stay, if you don't mind. (*Cutler shows annoyance; looks at Lora for an explanation; looks at Norton.*) Lora 's going to come back to me, and pick me out of this hole —

CUTLER (*looking sternly at Lora*). She is n't going to do anything so foolish, so criminal.

LORA. Oh, I don't know! George, don't ask me —

NORTON. I promise, I swear you shall never regret it.

CUTLER. No, she shall never regret it, because she shall never do it.

[*Looking at Lora.*

NORTON. It 's for her to decide, is n't it?

CUTLER. No. I 'm going to decide for her. I have decided. Now, my lad, back to your hotel, and your nurse, and your slops.

NORTON (*standing firm*). No. Lora, I know now what I 've got. I 'll never throw it away again.

[*Trying to go to her.*

CUTLER (*intercepting him*). George, this is too bad. She has been ill. I 've brought her round. I 'm her doctor, and I won't have her disturbed. Be off with you.

[*Rings bell.*

NORTON. What does she say?

[*Lora has shown signs of a great struggle.*

LORA. I can't say anything now. Let me think it over. I 'll write to you to-morrow.

CUTLER. She 'll write to you to-morrow. I 'll bring you the letter myself.

NORTON. No —

CUTLER. Yes. (*Sandford appears at door.*) Taxi, Sandford.

[*Exit Sandford.*

NORTON. You aren't going to kick me out?

CUTLER. George, I 'm very fond of you, as you know. But I 'd kick you every yard of the way from here to your hotel, rather than let her go back to you.

NORTON. Lora —

LORA. Please go now. I 'll write. Please go!

NORTON (*after a pause*). I 've got another lively night in front of me.

[*Exit Norton. Cutler goes with him to the door, looks*

at Lora, who has gone to the sofa, closes door, comes to her.

CUTLER. You love him still, then?

LORA. No, not at all — in that way. My love is quite dead.

CUTLER. Then why sacrifice your whole future to a man you don't love?

LORA. I can't bear to see him suffer, and not try to help him. I know it 's foolish, but I can't help it. I always give money to a beggar, even if I know he 's an impostor, and even if it won't help him.

CUTLER. That 's a divine gift, too. But it 's a very mischievous one. Don't you see that if you go back to him now it will be a meaner, crueller martyrdom than before?

LORA. Oh, yes, I know. But I want to help him —

CUTLER. You can't. But you can drag yourself down again; you can spoil that wonderful voice of yours; you can waste the next four years on him as you have wasted the last four, and find at the end of it that you 've done no good to him, but only broken your heart, broken your health, and thrown away your last chance of peace and happiness; thrown away the love and admiration of your public, beggared yourself physically, mentally, morally, spiritually — every way, for a man who 'll only treat you in the future as he did in the past. You won't do it! You shan't! Promise me you 'll write him that you 'll never see his again!

LORA (*after a long pause; in a calm, firm voice*). Yes. I ll never see him again.

CUTLER. You mean that?

LORA. Yes. You shall see the letter.

CUTLER. And take it to him myself?

LORA. Yes. (*He looks at her anxiously.*) I mean it; you need n't fear.

CUTLER. Good. I 'll keep you to that. And now we can take down our harp from the willow and tune up afresh.

(*Lora has gone away and sat down. She is crying a little.*) What is it?

LORA. It all seems so useless, so hopeless. Does nothing ever come to fruit?

CUTLER. Yes. That voice of yours has just ripened to perfection. What a harvest of music there is in it! I thought last night it had never been so rich and full and persuasive. Oh, my dear, these old sorrows, these old sufferings, these old loves and hates and hopes and despairs, what are they but the discords that we have to control and select and compel into a deep harmony, for the ease and healing of others.

LORA. Then I'm never to have a life of my own?

CUTLER. No. "He only can live the world's life who has renounced his own." You've got to renounce your own life and live the world's life. There's where you'll find your satisfaction. There's where you'll find an outlet for your divine pity, and your divine song. You mustn't defraud the public any longer. You've got to sing. It's your duty, just as it's the soldier's duty to be found at his post. And if you run away you deserve to be court-martialled and shot. Think what God has given you to give out to others. It's the most precious, the most divine thing on earth—this *vox humana*. See what we are ready to pay for it, in worship, in love, in admiration, in applause, in money—more than we pay to any statesman, or artist, or poet, or soldier. It's the music of all music. And it's ours; it's not yours; it's ours! we demand it from you. We demand you shall treasure it, and hoard it up for us. We will have your very best. And for the future you'll give it to us, won't you?

LORA. I'll try! Dear sage, I'll try.

[*John Treganza comes in from the balcony, much excited; a roll of music in his hand.*

JOHN. I've got it at last! I've done it!

CUTLER. What?

JOHN. Fair Rosamond's song. It has been haunting me

for months. And to-night it rushed into my head, faster than I could score it down. (*Pressing the roll into Lora's hands.*) Just look over that, will you, and tell me if it will do?

[*Lora takes the music and goes over the notes to herself.*

CUTLER. You're satisfied with it yourself?

JOHN. No, not quite satisfied with the opera all through. I shall do bigger things by-and-bye, when I get a bigger subject. "Fair Rosamond" is rather a stale theme.

CUTLER. There are no stale themes, or stale stories. There are only stale authors.

JOHN. There's one thing about "Fair Rosamond"—it has a good strong love interest. And they will have plenty of love in the theatre.

CUTLER. They will have plenty of love—in the theatre.

[*Lora hums out a few notes of Fair Rosamond's song.*

[*Seccombe enters.*

SECCOMBE. The printers are ringing up for "The Future of the Human Race."

CUTLER. All right, Seccombe. They shall have it. Wait a moment. (*Lora hums a note or two.*) We'll try it over after supper.

JOHN. Could n't we run over the song now? I want to hear how it comes out.

LORA. Come, then.

[*Exit Lora, followed by John.*

CUTLER (*very briskly*). Now, Seccombe, let's polish off the "Human Race." I'm just in the mood for it.

(*Seccombe sits at table, and takes out his copying note-book and pencil. Cutler feels in his waistcoat pocket.*) I've got all my notes made.

[*Takes out a few slips of paper on which are pencilled notes.*

SECCOMBE. There's only the tag—

CUTLER. Tags are tedious excrescences, Seccombe.

SECCOMBE. Yes—you'll cut it short, won't you?

CUTLER. I can't, Seccombe. I can't spare the Human

Race. They don't deserve it. Besides, I want to show off, and end in a pæan.

SECCOMBE. You aren't going to try any fine writing, are you?

CUTLER. I'm very much afraid I am. There used to be a bit of the poet in me. Let's see if we can wake him up.

SECCOMBE. You told me always to call a halt when you started fine writing.

CUTLER. Call it the next time. Now, are you ready? (*Giving down from his notes.*) And over all the labours and habitations of men, over all the cities and desert places of the earth, the implacable old Mother rings out her untiring carillon, from a tongue of iron in a fortress of stone—

SECCOMBE (*stops, looks up*). You don't suppose this is the kind of stuff the British public wants, do you?

CUTLER. No, they don't want it. But they need it. So let them have it, to correct their self-importance.

SECCOMBE. They won't understand it.

CUTLER. The onus lies upon them. I love to be a stumbling-block to fools. How far have you got?

SECCOMBE. "The implacable old Mother rings out her untiring carillon—"

CUTLER. From a tongue of iron in a fortress of stone. "Multiply, my children! Increase and multiply!" In sweat and sorrow and agony, bring forth the works of your hands, and the children of your loins. Increase and multiply! The earth is yours. Possess it, and encumber it for a season. Waste my substance! Waste your own! Come and go! Love and hate! Experiment! Toil! Blunder! Weep!

SECCOMBE (*writing*). "Weep!"

CUTLER (*dictating, getting more excited*). Succour and devour each other. Sustain and destroy. Make war. Make peace. Fail in your purposes, you accomplish mine. Thwart me, you further me. Obey me, I frustrate you. What you sow, I reap. What you devas-

tate, I replenish. What you build, I pull down. Your will is the smoke of my nostrils, and all your generations are weeds that my breath has sown —

SECCOMBE (*grumbles*). They 'll never stand this —

CUTLER (*rather angrily*). Take down! Take down! Take down! (*Walking about, looking occasionally at his notes, then half-closing his eyes, and dictating more excitedly.*) I called you forth to supplant you. I begot you to disinherit you. Before I fashioned you, I had blotted you out; ere ever you were born, I had named you nothingness and dust. A deep pit of oblivion have I digged for you; and there shall you be buried, and all memory of you perish, as of them that are dead of old.

SECCOMBE (*writing*). "Dead of old."

CUTLER. Yet increase and multiply, my children! Fill the void places of the earth. Rejoice for an hour. Increase and multiply. The sun's blue vault I stretch above you, and Iris's rain-dyed bow. For you I paint the clouds with gold and vermilion; and for you I powder the night with diamonds. Increase and multiply. Springtime and summer and harvest I vouchsafe you; laughter and music and wine; friendship, and the prattle of children —

(*A nightingale in the garden gives out a few deep, startling notes: "Jug! Jug! Jug!" Cutler, pausing to listen.*)

The old strain outside, Seccombe.

(*A few chords of Rosamond's song are struck on the piano in the next room, and Lora's voice is heard essaying the song, "I am loved, I am owned, I am mated."*)

The old strain inside, Seccombe.

SECCOMBE. There was an article in the last number of the "Medical Review" proving that love is a form of paranoia.

CUTLER. It 's a very agreeable form of paranoia.

SECCOMBE. My fit cost me three hundred pounds.

[*The nightingale again gives out startling notes: "Jug! Jug! Jug!"*

CUTLER. Don't be a dog in the manger, Seccombe. Don't grudge poor mortals their "drop of Venus' honeyed joy, succeeded soon by chilly care."

[*A few chords are struck in the next room, and Lora tries her voice, uttering deep rich notes. He creeps noiselessly to the door and opens it very slowly; then comes down, a step or two away from it, listening.*

SECCOMBE. What about the "Human Race"?

CUTLER. Oh, let it perish. Listen!

[*Lora through the open door sings Fair Rosamond's song.*

I

I am loved, I am owned, I am mated;
Swell, thrush, that gold-bright throat;
Burst, pierce, that wild sweet note;
He draws near, lord of me, long awaited;
Spill rich fierce sounds like wine,
Pour out my soul with thine;
Sing! Sing! Sing!
Come meet me! Come meet me! Come meet me!
Sing! Sing! Sing!
For the garlanded earth is a song, and a fire, and a bloom, new created.
Sing! Sing! Sing!

II

Swift he rides; hot he spurs; on he presses;
Plunge, horse, with sure proud feet;
Fly, ground, their glad quick beat;
He breaks way through the green wildernesses;
Stop, heart, and bound again;
Gallop with pantings; then
Leap! Leap! Leap!
I greet thee! I greet thee! I greet thee!
Leap! Leap! Leap!
To my arms, and there rest, while day sinks; then fulfilled, after utmost caresses,
Sleep! Sleep! Sleep!

CURTAIN

MARY GOES FIRST

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS AND AN EPILOGUE

TO MISS MARIE TEMPEST

Dear Marie Tempest:

An author who has spent many months in the perplexing business of constructing and writing a play naturally grows tired of it as soon as, or even before, it is produced. It is a tribute to your delightful performance of Mary Whichello that, though I find a decreasing interest in watching the play, I find an increasing pleasure in watching your performance.

In every play it matters little what the author has conceived and written, if it is not vitalised by the actor. It is only that part of a play, or that part of a character, which is thus vitalised by the acting — it is only this which counts with an audience.

How wonderfully you have vitalised every moment of Mary Whichello! How right is every accent, how clearly cut every gesture, how significant every movement, every glance, every look! What a happy vivacity of mischief, what a fascinating, busy energy there is about it all, like that of some pretty butterfly suddenly become industrious!

You seem to have a perpetual enjoyment in your art. It is n't work; it is just a pleasurable activity, which infects all who watch it. In these days of long runs, how often does one notice a decline of the actor's interest in his work after the first few weeks of a successful play. The general performance is apt to grow stale and perfunctory. If it is a comedy, it is forced into a noisy farce; if it is a serious drama, it loses its freshness and sincerity of feeling. But an impersonation of yours continuously retains its first bright, eager impulse; it remains spontaneous to the end, and kindles a responsive sympathy of laughter and emotion as surely on the last night as on the first.

Gratefully and admiringly yours,

Henry Arthur Jones.

"Mary Goes First" was originally produced at the Playhouse, London, on September 18, 1913.

Original Cast

Sir Thomas Bodsworth.....	Mr. Kenyon Musgrave
Richard Whichello	Mr. Charles V. France
Felix Galpin	Mr. W. Graham Browne
Mr. Tadman	Mr. George Shelton
Dr. Chesher	Mr. Herbert Ross
Harvey Betts, one of the Junior Liberal Whips	Mr. Richard Lluellyn
Pollard.....	Mr. John Alexander
Dakin	Mr. Horton Cooper
Lady Bodsworth	Miss Hamley Clifford
Ella Southwood	Miss Margaret Brühling
Mrs. Tadman	Miss Claire Pauncefort
and	
Mary (Mrs.) Whichello	Miss Marie Tempest

MARY GOES FIRST

ACT I

SCENE I. *Drawing-room at Felix Galpin's, on an evening in early January. At the back, left, is a wide opening, hung with curtains, which are open and give a view of a further room. In the right corner at back is a door. On the right side in the centre is a large fireplace. On the left side, down stage, is a bow window. The rooms are brightly and comfortably furnished in a modern style. There is an absence of feminine knick-knacks. Nothing indicates very good or very bad taste in the occupier. Everything is ordinary and unobtrusive; the furniture is such as would be carelesly chosen by a young professional man from the best shop in a large provincial town. A card-table open, with packs of cards and bridge-markers, is at the back. A bright fire is burning and the room is well lighted and looks cheerful. A few flowers on the shelf, and a large, handsome bouquet on a table, left.*

Discover: Dakin the butler. Enter Dr. Chesher, a Harley Street physician, about sixty, in evening dress.

CHESHER. Mr. Galpin back from the office yet?

DAKIN. Yes, sir. He arrived just after you had gone up to dress. Here he is, sir.

[*Enter Felix Galpin, a good-looking young lawyer, rather over thirty; smart, amiable, good-tempered; a very engaging personality. He is in evening dress, with a very rare orchid in his buttonhole.*

FELIX (*advancing cordially to Chesher, shaking hands*). Ah, my dear uncle! How are you?

CHESHER. Excellent!

FELIX (*to Dakin*). Dakin, get on to the champagne with the fish. Keep the glasses filled.

DAKIN. Yes, sir.

[*Going.*

FELIX. And, Dakin, when you announce Sir Thomas and Lady Bodsworth, throw it up a bit — (*illustrating*) — "Sir Thomas and Lady Bodsworth." Like that!

DAKIN. Yes, sir.

[*Exit Dakin.*

FELIX. He only got his knighthood last week, and she was a grocer's daughter; so they'll like to hear their title rolled out. Well, my dear uncle, it's awfully good of you to run down to this hole —

CHESHER. How are things looking?

FELIX. Thundering bad. The Warkinstall people are too busy to go to law. They spend all their time making portmanteaus and harness instead of going to law and doing me a good turn. I've only had one job for a fortnight.

CHESHER. But the practice was a good one when you bought it.

FELIX. It had gone down. And when my predecessor died, old Tadman nipped in and collared the best part of it.

CHESHER (*looking round*). But you've taken this big house in the best suburb — and you're giving dinner-parties —

FELIX. All the best people, such as they are, live in St. John's Hill. So I took this house, dine them, go to church regularly, fuss up all the old dowagers, play cricket and lawn tennis with the young people, subscribe to all their confounded charities, just to get in with them all.

CHESHER. In order to arrive, you show everybody that you have arrived.

FELIX. That's it. But if I don't arrive very soon, I shall have to change my point of view, chuck the Tories

and Church people, and go in a mucker for dissent and radicalism.

CHESHER. Will that be necessary?

FELIX. It's absolutely necessary that I should n't starve. My income last year was eighty-six pounds. I've got seven pounds in the bank, and I have n't paid for to-night's dinner-party. Is n't it about time I changed my political principles?

CHESHER. It is better to change one's political principles than to starve.

FELIX. Oh, if it comes to *principles*, my *principles* are thoroughly Tory — so far as they go. Especially as in Warkinstall all the nicest people are Tories.

CHESHER. The present member is a Tory, is n't he?

FELIX. Elkington? Yes, Elkington is a strong Tory.

CHESHER. The object of going into politics being to get something out of it, the question for a sensible man is which party he can get most out of.

FELIX. Just so. And I should have turned over to the Radicals before this, only —

CHESHER. Only?

FELIX. I've lately got very friendly with the Whichellos.

CHESHER. The Whichellos?

FELIX. They're quite the best people in Warkinstall — rather a different cut from the rest. He's a big manufacturer here, and a very decent fellow. Mrs. Whichello is the leader of Warkinstall society — if you can call it society. She bosses everything in Warkinstall — or she has bossed everything up to now. But now old Bodsworth has got this title — he's another big manufacturer and the Mayor of Warkinstall — he has just built a barn of a sanatorium, and got this knighthood for it —

CHESHER. Oh, yes. I saw his name in the New Year's honours last week — very low down.

FELIX. Well, low down or not, he has got his knighthood. And jolly hard he and Lady Bodsworth have worked to

get it — out of a Liberal Government. I don't think the Whichellos will quite like it, Mrs. Whichello especially. She 's a delightful little woman, but she does like to play first fiddle. Oh, does n't she? And now I expect Lady Bodsworth will want to have a look-in.

CHESHER. They 're coming to-night?

FELIX. Yes, the Whichellos, the Bodsworths, the Tadmans, and — Miss Southwood.

CHESHER. Miss Southwood?

FELIX. Mrs. Whichello's sister — such a charming girl — in fact, well — I 'm engaged to her.

CHESHER. On eighty-six pounds a year?

FELIX. Ella has a little money of her own. We aren't formally engaged, except between our two selves. But Mrs. Whichello is on our side, and I don't think Whichello will stand out. Ella is only nineteen, and Whichello is her guardian. That 's the reason I have n't gone over to the Radicals.

CHESHER. Why?

FELIX. Whichello is a Tory, and very strong on Tariff Reform, so I 've got to keep in with him. And I thought if only I can manage to hang on for a year or two with the Tories and Church people — Tadman 's getting old and groggy — he may pop off some day —

CHESHER. What is the amount of Miss Southwood's fortune?

FELIX. Five or six hundred a year. But I don't want to sponge on her. And if you 'd stand by me for a bit — you 've been such a good friend — I don't like to ask you, but —

CHESHER. All right, my dear boy, I 'll see what I can do.

FELIX. Thanks. It 's awfully good of you. And now you 're down here, you might give me a lift with the Bodsworths.

CHESHER. How?

FELIX. Bodsworth's sanatorium is going to pot. They 're

killed a patient with radium. He was a favourite curate —

CHESHER. Seems a drastic measure to take — even with a curate.

FELIX. Then Bodsworth is very keen on hot water. And he's having ructions with the doctors about the treatment. Then just as he gets his knighthood, there's a blazing scandal about a young house surgeon and one of the nurses — I've asked him to show you over the sanatorium to-morrow morning.

CHESHER. Thank you. What for?

FELIX. Well, as you're a leading London physician, he'll be flattered. You might buck him up about his hot-water treatment — he may be having a lawsuit with the doctors —

CHESHER. In that case, I should probably be on the side of the doctors.

FELIX. But hot water must be a cure for some diseases. Isn't it?

CHESHER. As a panacea it's about equal to most other cures.

FELIX. Well, there you are. And you can praise the situation — the salubrious air and the magnificent view — miles and miles of heather — and I say, I've put you next to Lady Bodsworth at dinner to-night — of course I take her in — you sit next —

CHESHER. What subject of conversation would be congenial to her?

FELIX. Oh, the knighthood. You needn't talk about anything else. She has only been "my lady" a week. I'm giving this little dinner in honour of the event. I got that bouquet down from Covent Garden to present to her.

CHESHER (*smelling*). Gorgeous!

FELIX. Isn't it?

CHESHER. Looks almost equal to a baronetcy.

FELX (*listening, taking out watch*). There's a motor just driven up. You haven't congratulated me about Ella.

CHESHER. I do, most heartily.

FELIX. Wait till you see her. I wish for her sake I'd gone in for politics instead of the law, especially now there's four hundred a year to start with. My old Charterhouse chum, Harvey Betts, has just been made Junior Whip to the Liberal Party.

CHESHER. So I see in the papers this morning.

FELIX. When Harvey was at Oxford, he was the fiercest young Tory. Russian despotism was too mild for him.

CHESHER. When a man talks that kind of nonsense at twenty, you know he'll talk the other kind of nonsense before he's forty.

[*Enter Dakin.*

DAKIN (*announces*). Miss Southwood.

[*Ella enters in evening dress, an attractive modern girl of nineteen. Exit Dakin.*

FELIX. How d' ye do?

[*Shaking hands.*

ELLA. Oh, Mr. Galpin, Mary has sent me on to say that she and Dick may be a few minutes late. Will you excuse them?

FELIX. Certainly. (*Introducing.*) My uncle, Dr. Chesher. Miss Southwood.

CHESHER. How d' ye do?

[*Shaking hands.*

ELLA. How d' ye do? Is this your first visit to Warkinstall?

CHESHER. Yes. I've not been able to get away since my nephew has settled here.

ELLA. I hope you'll come again. (*To Felix.*) Mary has given me a message for you—

[*Slightly glancing at Chesher.*

CHESHER (*taking the hint*). Felix, I've got a telegram to send. Will you excuse me?

[*Exit Chesher. Felix watches him off, then goes quickly to Ella and snatches a kiss.*

FELIX (*very admiringly*). You look charming!

ELLA. Do I? I've been so rushed — I had to throw my things on. Mary's terribly upset.

FELIX. What about?

ELLA. Lady Bodsworth.

FELIX. What's the matter?

ELLA. The woman has become quite insufferable. She does nothing but wallow in this knighthood.

FELIX. It is rather a dizzy honour. Give me another kiss — (*they kiss*) — and tell me all about Lady Bodsworth's wallowing.

ELLA. Her head's turned. She insists on patronising Mary. Fancy any one patronising Mary! There was quite a flare-up after the meeting this afternoon.

FELIX. Meeting?

ELLA. This Working Girls' Protection Society that they are getting up.

FELIX. Oh, yes — to look after the behaviour of the factory girls.

ELLA. Well, it has been rather shocking. And last month the wives of the manufacturers met, and decided to form a Girls' Protection Society, and let all the factory girls know that they'd be expected to join.

FELIX. Kind of Mutual Moral Insurance Company.

ELLA. Mary took a lot of trouble, and naturally she expected to be made president.

FELIX. And was n't she?

ELLA. No. Lady Bodsworth has worked the thing, and this afternoon at the meeting she was elected president. And she positively gloated over Mary.

FELIX. Did she? Give me another kiss — (*snatching a kiss*) — and tell me what Mary did when Bodsworth gloated.

ELLA. She came home and nearly had hysterics.

FELIX. Nearly? I wonder she did n't quite. However, I suppose we shall have to let Lady Bodsworth gloat.

ELLA. No. Mary sent me on to say that, as the knight-

hood has only been announced, and Mr. Bodsworth has n't yet got the title, she supposes in strict etiquette you 'll take her in to dinner to-night.

FELIX (*aghast*). Take her in to dinner —?

ELLA. Mary would n't have raised the question with any one but you; but as you want to be engaged to me, she thinks you might oblige her.

FELIX. But how can I?

ELLA. It 's very hard on Mary. She has always been taken in first at every dinner-party in Warkinstall. Now Lady Bodsworth will always go first, so this will be the last time for poor Mary.

FELIX. Is she very keen on it?

ELLA. Well, she says she does n't mind. But between ourselves she is simply furious at Lady Bodsworth's rudeness to her this afternoon.

FELIX. What on earth am I to do?

ELLA. He is n't actually knighted. It would be strict etiquette, would n't it?

FELIX. I don't know the strict etiquette of the thing, but I 'm giving this dinner in honour of the knighthood. I 've told Bodsworth so. And I 've got that bouquet for Lady Bodsworth.

ELLA. Can't you explain to the Bodsworths?

FELIX. Good heavens, no! I should make them enemies for life. No, I must take in the old Bodsworth woman now!

[*Enter Dakin, announcing rather loudly, a little overdoing it.*

DAKIN. Sir Thomas and Lady Bodsworth.

[*Enter Sir Thomas and Lady Bodsworth. Exit Dakin. Lady Bodsworth is about forty-five. She is rather stout and made up to look young. Her hair is obtrusively golden, very plentiful, and puffed out. Her complexion is artificial, and her cheeks bloom with a magenta tint. She is handsomely and showily dressed, with a good deal of jewellery. She is patronising, fussy, self-conscious,*

self-satisfied, and beaming with amiability. Bodsworth is a stolid, thick-set, rather pompous man about fifty, with large, immobile features; thick, coarse black hair turning grey; he is quite destitute of humour. Felix advances very cordially to Lady Bodsworth as Ella shakes hands with Sir Thomas.

FELIX (*shaking hands*). My dear Lady Bodsworth, this is really good of you.

LADY BODSWORTH. We've been quite overwhelmed with invitations since Sir Thomas received his honour. Everybody seems so pleased that we have been recognised. We are lunching at Petbury Park on Tuesday.

FELIX. I'm in luck.

LADY BODSWORTH. I really think you are. We had three invitations for dinner to-night. But as we had accepted yours, we thought it would n't be honourable to put you off.

FELIX. Noblesse oblige!

LADY BODSWORTH. Quite so. Ah, Ella, my dear!

[*Goes to Ella and kisses her very affectionately, talks with her.*

FELIX. Sir Thomas, how are you?

SIR THOMAS (*shaking hands*). Run off my legs. My own business — municipal business — church business — political business — and now this honour — really, if people knew what it entailed they would scarcely envy me the distinction which it has pleased his Majesty to confer upon me.

[*Chesher has re-entered.*

FELIX (*calling off Lady Bodsworth*). Lady Bodsworth, let me present my uncle, Dr. Chesher of Harley Street.

LADY BODSWORTH. I'm very pleased to meet you.

CHESHER (*shaking hands*). Delighted!

LADY BODSWORTH. Sir Thomas has just given a sanatorium to Warkinstall. From first to last it won't cost less than —

SIR THOMAS. Sh! my dear. Whether it costs thirty thousand or forty thousand, what does it matter?

FELIX. My uncle is very much interested in hot-water treatment —

[*With a little wink and an imploring look at Chesher.*

SIR THOMAS (*interested*). Indeed! I'm sorry to say my present staff are very much prejudiced in favour of their own methods.

LADY BODSWORTH. Sir Thomas has derived so much benefit himself from hot water that he wishes all the patients to be given a chance.

FELIX (*looking anxiously at Chesher*). My uncle says that in certain diseases hot water — eh, uncle? In certain diseases —?

CHESHER. It was extensively used by Gil Blas of Santillane when he practised in Seville.

SIR THOMAS. How did it answer in his case?

CHESHER. Several of his patients died. But that may have been a natural predisposition, such as a doctor often encounters in his patients. And Gil Blas stuck to his treatment.

SIR THOMAS. Quite right. Is he in practice now?

CHESHER. I'm afraid not — but his reputation remains.

SIR THOMAS. Because that's the kind of doctor I want at the head of my sanatorium.

[*Enter Dakin.*

DAKIN (*announcing*). Mr. and Mrs. Tadman.

[*Enter Mr. and Mrs. Tadman. Exit Dakin. Mrs. Tadman is a pleasant, motherly, middle-class woman about sixty. Tadman is about seventy, with straggling white hair and a shiny, rosy complexion — gouty — shaky — tremulous.*

FELIX (*shaking hands*). How d' ye do?

MRS. TADMAN. How d' ye do?

FELIX. So kind of you to come. (*To Tadman.*) How are you?

[*Shaking hands.*

TADMAN. First rate — just as good a man as ever I was.

FELIX. Then you 'll be able to do justice to a bottle of port.

TADMAN (*his eyes brighten, and he briskly rubs his decayed hands*). I'll try! I'll try! There 's only one wine — (*with a little anticipatory smack of the lips*) — port! Sir Thomas, I hope you won't change your principles on Tariff Reform.

SIR THOMAS. Change my principles on Tariff Reform?

TADMAN. Now the Liberal Government has honoured you.

SIR THOMAS. The Liberal Government makes a very great mistake if it supposes that I am to be bought by a knighthood.

TADMAN (*comes closer to him, glances at Ella, who is talking to Mrs. Tadman*). I hear that Whichello is wobbling over the food taxes —

SIR THOMAS. Yes, and he 's siding with the Radicals against me over the cemetery and the tramways extension.

[*Enter Dakin.*

DAKIN (*announcing*). Mr. and Mrs. Whichello.

[*Exit Dakin.*

[*Mrs. Whichello is a piquant, attractive little lady, rather under thirty. She has the air of one accustomed to be first in her own circle. She is clever enough to get her own way by finesse and persuasion when she cannot command it by authority — a very determined little creature. She is charmingly but very quietly dressed in a well-made gown. He hair is done very plainly and neatly. She wears a very handsome pearl and diamond necklace, and no other jewellery, except a wedding ring. She shows suppressed excitement from the afternoon quarrel with Lady Bodsworth. She is evidently full of mischief, ripe for an explosion, and is preserving her self-control with difficulty. Dick Whichello is a good-looking, very ordinary Englishman of the better class; rather over thirty-five, getting stout and lazy; something*

of the sporting type; very casual, amiable, and easy-going as a rule, but very obstinate and hot-tempered when he is provoked.

FELIX (*very cordially to Mary*). Delightful of you to spare me an evening. (*Shaking hands.*) How are you? No need to ask. (*Turning to Dick, shaking hands.*) How are you?

DICK. Splendid.

FELIX (*introducing*). Dr. Chesher — Mrs. Whichello.

MARY (*shaking hands with Chesher*). How d' ye do?

CHESHER. Very pleased to meet you.

FELIX (*introducing*). Mr. Whichello — Dr. Chesher.

[*Dick and Chesher shake hands and talk. Mary nods and smiles to Mrs. Tadman, who returns the nod and smile.*

MARY (*to Tadman*). How d' ye do?

[*Shaking hands.*

TADMAN. Growing younger every day.

MARY (*bowing to Sir Thomas*). Sir Thomas, I have congratulated you on your honour, haven't I?

SIR THOMAS (*very stiffly*). Thank you, you have congratulated me three times during the past week.

MARY. Have I? (*Very sweetly.*) Oh, I really must give myself the pleasure of congratulating you once more. May I?

SIR THOMAS (*shows resentment*). If you wish, but — really, I —

[*Turns to Lady Bodsworth, who stands looking at Mary, maliciously triumphant. There is an awkward pause as the two women look at each other. Mary bows very distantly to Lady Bodsworth. Lady Bodsworth barely inclines her head. Felix watches apprehensively and tries to smooth the unpleasantness.*

FELIX (*to Lady Bodsworth*). Mrs. Whichello, like all of us, feels she cannot sufficiently express her congratulations to her old friends; eh, Mrs. Whichello?

MARY. Yes, that 's it.

FELIX (*to Mary*). And I'm sure Lady Bodsworth is equally pleased to receive your congratulations.

LADY BODSWORTH. Oh, I've no wish to be unfriendly. I'm quite ready to forget our little tiff this afternoon if she is.

MARY. Oh, quite.

LADY BODSWORTH (*patronisingly*). You and Mr. Whichello must come and lunch with us some day.

MARY. We *shall* feel honoured. Shan't we, Dick?

DICK. Yes, delighted!

LADY BODSWORTH. Shall we say Tuesday? No, I forgot. On Tuesday Sir Thomas and I are lunching at Petbury Park. The Countess saw me yesterday in the High Street. She stopped her motor instantly, and gave me the most pressing invitation.

MARY. The dear Countess!

LADY BODSWORTH. She was so hearty in her congratulations. She said, "Come on Tuesday. Petbury and I shall be quite alone, and we shall have you all to ourselves."

MARY. How delightful for you! And for them!

LADY BODSWORTH. So it can't be Tuesday. Shall we say Wednesday?

MARY. May I look at my book when I get home?

LADY BODSWORTH. Certainly. Name your own day, and remember that for the future I shan't bear any ill feeling; and I hope you won't.

MARY. Ill feeling! My dear Lady Bodsworth, I'm only too thankful for your sake that this dreadful scandal at the sanatorium wasn't made public before the New Year's honours were announced.

SIR THOMAS. Why? What difference would it have made?

MARY. Well, with such disgraceful behaviour going on in your beautiful new building before the walls were scarcely dry, it would have made it very difficult for the Government to reward you for your noble gift to the town.

SIR THOMAS (*very stiffly*). I don't see that. We need n't discuss the matter.

MARY. No, no. Better keep it quiet. I hope there 's nothing more to come out —

SIR THOMAS. We have made a thorough inquiry, and the affair is terminated.

MARY. I 'm so glad you 've managed to hush it up. (*To Lady Bodsworth.*) What have you done with the nurse?

SIR THOMAS (*very stiffly*). We have expelled her.

MARY. Quite right. Quite right. I hope you made her feel that her shocking conduct has shed quite a blight over the general rejoicing.

SIR THOMAS. Not at all! Not at all!

MARY. It has shed a blight on my rejoicing. I can never go by your beautiful sanatorium now without dreading that the nurses and doctors are —

SIR THOMAS (*interrupting*). We need not pursue the subject.

MARY. No, no. The less said the better. But I always distrusted her yellow hair. I 've invariably noticed that when a woman has that peculiar shade of hair, and especially when she dresses it in that ridiculous tously fashion — (*She sees the expression on Sir Thomas's face and makes a feigned gesture of intense vexation.*) Oh, what have I said? What have I said? My dear Lady Bodsworth! How could I be so thoughtless! How could I —!

[*Making little helpless, appealing gestures of apology to Lady Bodsworth and to all the company.*

LADY BODSWORTH (*much offended*). I hope you don't compare me with a person of that class —

MARY No! No! A thousand apologies! Now, do say you forgive me!

LADY BODSWORTH (*curtly*). Oh, certainly.

MARY. Thank you. I can't tell you how much I admire your hair, no matter how it 's done. By-and-bye I shall

ask you to tell me how you get that effect. Now you will tell me, won't you?

LADY BODSWORTH (*curtly*). Oh, it's quite simple.

MARY. Ah, it may be easy for you —

FELIX (*who has been very anxiously watching, interposes*). You must n't discuss these delicate little feminine secrets before us men. Mrs. Whichello, you 're passionately fond of flowers — what do you think of these for early January?

[*Draws Mary off to the bouquet.*

MARY (*goes into raptures*). Roses and carnations! (*Takes up the bouquet, smells it, admires it.*) Aren't they exquisite?

[*To Ella, who has joined them.*

ELLA. Perfectly lovely!

MARY (*putting down the flowers*). Did you give my message to Mr. Galpin?

ELLA (*looking at Felix*). Yes.

[*They draw together and are seen to be talking eagerly. Mary is excited, and is urging her point of etiquette. Felix is deprecatory, apologetic, explanatory, and persuasive. Lady Bodsworth is talking to Mrs. Tadman, with angry glances at Mary. Mrs. Tadman is trying to soothe her. Sir Thomas, Tadman, Chesher, and Dick are grouped together.*

DICK. You must join our golf club, Sir Thomas.

SIR THOMAS (*shakes his head*). Too busy — and now I 've been recognised — it 's a great burden — no time for golf.

DICK. He must make time, must n't he, doctor?

CHESHER. As a serious career, golf is an excellent substitute for politics.

DICK. By Jove, yes. (*To Sir Thomas.*) I shall put you up. We must have you. The fact is our present course is rotten. We want you to let us have that corner slope below the sanatorium.

[*Chesher joins Lady Bodsworth and Mrs. Tadman.*

SIR THOMAS. I am about to enclose that slope in the sanatorium grounds for the benefit of my patients.

DICK. Oh, they can stroll about it. We really must have that slope.

SIR THOMAS. It 's quite impossible. I 'm a little surprised at your asking, after opposing me on the Town Council with regard to the tramways and the cemetery.

DICK. Oh, we must give the new town a decent cemetery.

SIR THOMAS. There is plenty of room in our venerable old churchyard. And I hope, when it pleases heaven to call me to itself, that what is mortal of me will repose in the shadow of our ancient parish church.

DICK. You don't want what is mortal of you to drain down into my factory, do you?

SIR THOMAS (*offended*). I consider that remark as quite uncalled for — indeed, profane. I intend to oppose the cemetery and the tramway extension. Especially as both proposals emanate from the Radicals.

DICK. What does it matter where they emanate from, if they 're for the good of the town?

SIR THOMAS. We must keep the control and administration of all these matters in our own hands. And I trust that as Chairman of the Conservative Party I may rely on your support.

[*Dick utters a little discontented grumble.*

TADMAN. There 's another thing, Whichello. We must have a thorough, complete, well-considered measure of Tariff Reform.

DICK. Oh, I 'm a convinced Tariff Reformer, providing the leather trade is considered. But I 'm hanged if I see how we 're going to carry the food taxes.

TADMAN. It 's absolutely necessary. It all hangs together. I 've worked out a complete scheme. I can show you the figures.

SIR THOMAS. I hope, Whichello, you will reconsider your entire attitude. You are going the right way to split up the Conservative Party in Warkinstall.

[*Dick utters another discontented little growl. They go on discussing the matter. Chesher has joined Lady Bodsworth and Mrs. Tadman. Felix, Mary, and Ella have been talking among themselves.*

MARY. I merely raised it as a point of strict etiquette.

FELIX. I wish I could — but —

[*Looks helplessly at Ella.*

ELLA. I think you might have obliged Mary.

MARY (*turning to the bouquet*). It really does n't matter. Aren't these flowers perfectly exquisite?

FELIX. I'm glad you like them.

MARY. I dote on roses and carnations. Now, I'm sure you must have got them especially to please me, did n't you?

FELIX. Yes, I did.

[*Glances at Lady Bodsworth, whose back is turned to them.*

MARY (*to Ella*). Was n't it kind of him? He knew how fond I was of roses and carnations.

[*Smells them.*

FELIX (*glances again at Lady Bodsworth's back — hesitates — makes up his mind*). Will you accept them? I sent up to Covent Garden especially to get them for you.

[*Hands them to her.*

MARY. How good of you! Dick! Look at these flowers! Mr. Galpin sent up to Covent Garden to get them especially for me.

[*Goes to Mrs. Tadman and displays them in front of Lady Bodsworth, who holds herself enviously aloof.*

TADMAN (*who has been arguing with Dick*). No! No! My scheme is elastic. It tightens over bacon in one place, and relaxes in another. The same with cheese! That's the beauty of it! It gives and takes.

[*Felix has been talking to Ella, looking at his watch, and glancing anxiously at the door.*

FELIX. Sir Thomas, will you take in Mrs. Whichello?

Whichello — Mrs. Tadman. (*To Tadman.*) You 'll look after Miss Southwood, won't you? Uncle, you 'll have to bring up the rear. (*Joining Lady Bodsworth.*) Lady Bodsworth, I am to have the privilege.

[*The couples sort themselves and talk apart.*

LADY BODSWORTH (*enviously*). What a lovely bouquet you presented to Mrs. Whichello.

FELIX. Um! Not bad. (*Dropping his voice and looking cautiously round to see that they are not overheard.*) I don't care much for roses and carnations.

LADY BODSWORTH. They are rather vulgar.

FELIX. One orchid is worth a ton of them. I wonder if you 'd do me the honour to wear this —

[*Takes the orchid from his buttonhole.*

LADY BODSWORTH. I shall be pleased.

[*Looking enviously at Mary's bouquet.*

FELIX. Can you fasten it?

LADY BODSWORTH. Yes, I think.

FELIX. An orchid is the aristocrat of flowers. (*She places it in the neck of her dress, which is rather décolleté.*) That 's a very rare variety. (*With a little half-wink at Ella, who is watching.*) It 's the first specimen to come to Warkinstall. (*Admiring it.*) Ah, now it shows to advantage!

[*Enter Dakin.*

DAKIN. Dinner is served, sir.

[*Exit Dakin.*

MARY (*replacing her bouquet in the vase*). I 'll put them there till I go home.

LADY BODSWORTH (*going off arm-in-arm with Felix — speaking loudly so that Mary can hear*). Yes, an orchid is such an aristocratic flower — so very aristocratic.

[*Exeunt Felix and Lady Bodsworth.*

SIR THOMAS (*going off with Mary*). And he is also oppos ing me on the cemetery and tramways.

MARY. Is he? (*Turning to Dick, who is just behind her.*) Dick, I'm surprised at you opposing Sir Thomas. (*To Sir Thomas.*) I must talk to him very seriously.

[*Exeunt Sir Thomas and Mary.*

MRS. TADMAN (*on Dick's arm*). I don't quite understand Tariff Reform, but Mr. Tadman has worked it all out most carefully.

DICK. So have I, and I'm convinced that if we put on food taxes —

[*Exit with Mrs. Tadman on his arm.*

ELLA (*on Tadman's arm, turns round to Chesher*). I wish there was another of me to come in with you, Dr. Chesher.

[*Going off.*

CHESHER. Ah! You'd be much safer with medicine than you are with the law.

[*He follows them off. The curtain falls for a few seconds to signify the passing of the dinner-time.*

SCENE II. *The same, after dinner. The curtains between the rooms have been drawn closely together. Lady Bodsworth and Mrs. Tadman are seated near to each other, and apart from Mary and Ella. Mary has her bouquet in her hand and is admiring it. Ella is turning over a book of views.*

LADY BODSWORTH (*expansively*). We don't take it so much as an honour to ourselves as to the town.

MRS. TADMAN (*toadying*). That's what Mr. Tadman and I feel.

MARY (*solemnly*). That's what we all feel. Don't we, Ella?

ELLA. Oh, yes. Could n't we have some fireworks over it?

MARY. Ella, please put away that book, and listen to Lady Bodsworth.

(*Ella does so, and assumes an air of great interest in Lady Bodsworth.*)

You were saying, dear Lady Bodsworth —

LADY BODSWORTH (*ignoring Mary, speaks to Mrs. Tadman*). That is how Sir Thomas and I wish it to be regarded — as an honour to everybody in Warkinstall.

MARY. Will it go round?

LADY BODSWORTH. Go round?

MARY. There are forty thousand people in Warkinstall. It's very unselfish of you, dear Lady Bodsworth, to share your honour amongst us, but — well, there won't be much for each of us, will there?

LADY BODSWORTH (*getting angry*). Of course if you're annoyed —

MARY. Annoyed? My dear Lady Bodsworth! My very dear Lady Bodsworth!

LADY BODSWORTH (*to Mrs. Tadman*). As it appears to upset Mrs. Whichello, perhaps we'd better change the subject.

MARY. Oh, I love it! I could keep on all the evening.

LADY BODSWORTH (*to Mrs. Tadman*). We shall have a house in town for the season. Of course we shall have to go up when Sir Thomas receives —

[*Mary touches Ella's arm with a solemn look of reproof, as if calling her to pay reverential attention to Lady Bodsworth. Lady Bodsworth stops, upset.*

MARY (*after a pause of mock expectancy*). When does Sir Thomas expect to be commanded —?

LADY BODSWORTH. I should really be obliged if you would choose some other topic of conversation.

MARY. Certainly, dear Lady Bodsworth. (*Very sweetly.*) And what shall we talk about now? Oh, yes! So you are lunching at Petbury Park?

LADY BODSWORTH. We are lunching at Petbury Park.

MARY. On Tuesday, is n't it?

LADY BODSWORTH. I believe I have already mentioned that fact.

MARY. Yes, but why not mention it again, dear Lady Bodsworth?

LADY BODSWORTH. Because it might cause you pain.

MARY. Pain? My dear Lady Bodsworth! Why should it cause me pain?

LADY BODSWORTH. You're not invited, I believe?

MARY. We could n't expect it, as we dined there on Saturday.

LADY BODSWORTH (*upset*). Dined! Oh! (*Nonplussed.*) Indeed!

MARY (*more sweetly than ever*). And what shall we talk about now?

ELLA. I do think somebody ought to organise some fireworks —

MARY (*reprovingly*). My dear Ella, it is not for you to choose a topic of conversation. We are waiting for Lady Bodsworth —

[*Looking at Lady Bodsworth with an air of reverent expectancy.*

LADY BODSWORTH (*looks at Mary with withering scorn, then magnificently ignores her, and speaks to Mrs. Tadman*). Of course it's only natural that small minds should feel jealous when they see others selected for honour, when they themselves are left out in the cold.

[*Just deigning to glance at Mary.*

MARY. My dear Lady Bodsworth! My very dear Lady Bodsworth!

LADY BODSWOTRH. There's no need to "Lady Bodsworth" me quite so often.

MARY. No?

[*Lady Bodsworth rises, draws herself up, and again looks at Mary with withering scorn.*

LADY BODSWORTH (*to Mrs. Tadman*). I feel, dear, that you would be more comfortable in the next room.

[*Going toward curtains.*

MRS. TADMAN (*detaining her*). Oh, I should n't take any notice. I'm sure Mary wishes to remain friends, don't you, Mary?

MARY. Oh, certainly. But if Lady Bodsworth does n't

wish me to call her Lady Bodsworth, what am I to call her?

MRS. TADMAN. You used always to call each other "Fanny" and "Mary."

LADY BODSWORTH. It was quite at her own wish that I called her "Mary."

MARY. If I remember rightly, dear Lady Bodsworth, you asked me to call you "Fanny"; and said might you call me "Mary." And I replied, "Oh, certainly!" Everybody in Warkinstall calls me "Mary."

MRS. TADMAN. I don't suppose she'd mind if you called her "Fanny."

MARY (*looking mischievously at Lady Bodsworth*). I don't think I could call her "Fanny"—now! Dear Lady Bodsworth, would you think it disrespectful if I called you "Fanny"?

LADY BODSWORTH. It's quite immaterial to me what you call me. Please yourself.

MARY (*very sweetly*). Thank you so much. (*A little pause.*) And what shall we talk about now—Fanny?

LADY BODSWORTH (*enraged, is about to explode; controls herself; tries to think of something very satirical; fails*). I should much prefer that you didn't address any further remarks to me.

MARY. Very well, Fanny—(*checks herself*)—Lady Bodsworth.

LADY BODSWORTH (*seats herself with dignity and turns to Mrs. Tadman with the greatest amiability; speaks at Mary*). How very nicely the meeting for the Girls' Protection Society passed off this afternoon!

MRS. TADMAN. Yes—very.

[*Mary admonishes Ella by a look to pay reverential attention to Lady Bodsworth.*

LADY BODSWORTH. I was so glad that they elected me as president; because I do feel that in my new position I shall be able to do so much to keep the poor girls out of temptation—

(*Mary utters a little gaspy shriek, pulls herself up, and looks demurely in front of her.*)

Are you unwell, Mrs. Whichello?

MARY. Very nearly. Dear Lady Bodsworth, would you permit me to address one single remark to you?

LADY BODSWORTH (*suspiciously*). Oh, certainly.

MARY (*very respectful*). Don't you think, dear Lady Bodsworth, that these poor factory girls, with their love of finery, and making the most of themselves — don't you think, if they are allowed to see very much of you, they may be tempted to imitate —

LADY BODSWORTH. Imitate what?

MARY (*glancing at Lady Bodsworth's coiffure*). Those tresses —

LADY BODSWORTH (*gathers herself up for a great burst of indignation*). I have never been so insulted — I will not endure these insinuations! (*Splutters like a damp firework.*) Really I — just when everybody is so pleased that we've been honoured — really I — (*crying a little*) — I will not — (*Recovers herself.*) But I can quite understand your feeling so spiteful at not being elected president —

MARY. Spiteful, dear Lady Bodsworth?

LADY BODSWORTH. But I wouldn't show it. It's so small, so very small! I wouldn't be small if I were you!

MARY. Oh, if it comes to our figures — (*glancing at her own and Lady Bodsworth's*) — I'm very well satisfied.

LADY BODSWORTH (*magnificently indignant*). I will thank you not to make any further remarks *to* me or *about* me!

MARY. Very well, dear Lady Bodsworth!

LADY BODSWORTH (*to Mrs. Tadman*). I'm sorry you should be exposed to all this annoyance. But we needn't put up with it any longer. (*Beckons to Mrs. Tadman*

to follow her off at curtains; then turns to Mary very spitefully.) But you weren't elected president, were you?

[*Exit through curtains. Mrs. Tadman has risen, a little embarrassed.*

MRS. TADMAN (*in a low voice to Mary*). We all thought, as Sir Thomas had just been knighted, it would be a pretty compliment to elect her as president. I hope you don't mind —

MARY. Mind? My dear Mrs. Tadman! But those poor factory girls! Keep them out of temptation? Why, with her powdered cheeks and her yellow hair, she looks like an impropriety herself!

LADY BODSWORTH (*comes through the curtains, overwhelmed*). Oh! oh! oh!

[*Sir Thomas enters, followed at short intervals by Chesher, Dick, Tadman, and Felix.*

SIR THOMAS. What's the matter?

LADY BODSWORTH. I have never been so insulted —

SIR THOMAS. Insulted?

LADY BODSWORTH. Mrs. Whichello called me —

SIR THOMAS. What?

LADY BODSWORTH (*crying a little*). She said I was — Mrs. Tadman, you heard —

SIR THOMAS. What did she call you?

LADY BODSWORTH. I couldn't repeat the word. We had better go home at once.

[*Going toward door.*

FELIX (*stopping her*). No, Lady Bodsworth —

[*Tries to soothe her.*

DICK. Mary, what's this?

MARY. Nothing. I made a remark to Mrs. Tadman. Lady Bodsworth was in the next room. I didn't know she was listening. I'm sorry.

SIR THOMAS. Sorry? I wish to know what term you have applied to Lady Bodsworth.

[*There is a pause.*

FELIX. Sir Thomas, Mrs. Whichello has said she was sorry — I trust —

SIR THOMAS. I insist on knowing the exact term which has been applied to Lady Bodsworth. Fanny!

[*Calls Lady Bodsworth aside, questions her, and is seen to be shocked and indignant. Dick questions Mary, and is seen to show annoyance. Tadman questions Mrs. Tadman. Felix waits to question Tadman; when Tadman has received the information, Felix calls him aside, and questions him. Chesher joins them. Ella slips quietly between the curtains into the next room.*

DICK (*having questioned Mary, in a tone of annoyance*). You ought n't to have said it.

MARY. It slipped out.

DICK. Oh!

MARY. I tell you it slipped out.

DICK. Bodsworth, as an old friend I 'm sure you won't take any notice of this —

SIR THOMAS. Not take any notice? Do I understand, Whichello, that you approve of your wife calling Lady Bodsworth an impropriety?

DICK. Certainly not, but —

SIR THOMAS. Then perhaps you will ask her to make a full and ample apology.

[*Looks threateningly at Mary.*

DICK (*prompting*). Mary!

MARY. I 'm extremely sorry —

SIR THOMAS. Sorry? My wife an impropriety! The thing 's monstrous!

FELIX. I 'm sure Mrs. Whichello did n't use the word in any objectionable sense. It is a term that is often used in playful badinage — which I 'm quite sure is all Mrs. Whichello intended.

SIR THOMAS. I don't care what Mrs. Whichello intended. I am waiting for her to apologise.

[*Looks threateningly at Mary.*

[*A longish pause.*

MARY (*very simply and sincerely*). I am extremely sorry, Lady Bodsworth.

LADY BODSWORTH. "Sorry" is n't an apology, is it?

FELIX. Oh, yes, it 's quite equivalent, especially as Mrs. Whichello said it — with such genuine regret. Now that 's passed over. Can we get up a rubber at bridge?

[*Moving toward the card-table.*

SIR THOMAS. I do not play bridge, and I do not consider that it has passed over.

[*Looking at Lady Bodsworth.*

LADY BODSWORTH. It 's such a flagrant offence. I could n't pass it over without an apology.

FELIX. Mrs. Whichello, may I offer your sincere regrets, shall we say apologies, to Lady Bodsworth?

[*Lady Bodsworth looks very triumphantly at Mary — there is again a long pause.*

MARY. Certainly.

FELIX. There, Lady Bodsworth! That is very satisfactory, and we can all be friends again. Tadman, I know you 're longing for a rubber —

[*Again moving toward card-table.*

LADY BODSWORTH (*keeping her position, looking maliciously at Mary*). It 's so very flagrant. I should prefer an apology in writing — in case it might happen again.

[*Looking at Sir Thomas.*

SIR THOMAS. Certainly — you 're quite right. An apology in writing. (*Looking at Mary.*) Will that be forthcoming?

MARY (*very decisively*). No!

SIR THOMAS. Oh! Then do I understand that you call Lady Bodsworth an impropriety, and refuse to apologise?

MARY. I did not call Lady Bodsworth an impropriety. I said she looked like an impropriety. (*Looking intently at Lady Bodsworth, speaking very deliberately, slowly driving each word home.*) She does not look like

an impropriety — (*looking Lady Bodsworth up and down*) — not the least like an impropriety.

LADY BODSWORTH. Oh — oh — Sir Thomas, will you please have our motor called?

SIR THOMAS. One moment, Fanny. Tadman, I shall place this matter in your hands. You will please draw up a form of apology; make it very stringent, and submit it to me.

TADMAN. Yes — yes, Sir Thomas — but as I am also Whichello's legal adviser, I can act for both of you.

SIR THOMAS. You can act for me or for Mr. Whichello; but in this instance I prefer to have my own lawyer.

TADMAN. You 'd better let me arrange. I should advise Mrs. Whichello to retract —

MARY. Thank you, Mr. Tadman, we prefer to have our own lawyer.

DICK. No, no, Mary.

[*Is seen to be arguing with her.*

SIR THOMAS. You will oblige me, Tadman, by saying whether you intend to act for Mr. Whichello or for me.

TADMAN. Oh, for you, Sir Thomas, of course — but —

SIR THOMAS. Very well. If Galpin will kindly excuse you, we will take our measures at once. Mrs. Tadman had better come with us while the exact words that Mrs. Whichello used are fresh in her mind. I'm sorry to break up your party, Galpin —

FELIX. I 'm sorry for the reason, Sir Thomas. (*To Lady Bodsworth.*) But can't I persuade you —

LADY BODSWORTH. I could n't think of remaining in the company of — (*Looking indignantly at Mary.*) I'll wait downstairs, please, till our motor is ready.

FELIX (*offers his arm*). Allow me. I 'm sure Mrs. Whichello did n't intend —

[*Going off.*

LADY BODSWORTH. Oh, please don't mention her name.

[*Felix takes off Lady Bodsworth. The Tadmans are saying good-night and shaking hands with Dick and Mary.*

SIR THOMAS (*to Chesher*). Good-night, doctor. (*Shaking hands.*) My wife an impropriety! What is your opinion of that?

CHESHER. A very obvious error in classification.

SIR THOMAS. My wife an impropriety! (*Getting more angry.*) The more I think of it, the more monstrous it seems! (*Impatiently.*) Now, Tadman, if you're ready—

[*Exit Sir Thomas.*

MRS. TADMAN (*to Chesher*). Good-night.

CHESHER. Let me see you to the motor.

[*Takes off Mrs. Tadman.*

TADMAN (*shaking hands with Dick*). Very sorry—but as Sir Thomas is my oldest client—I'm sure you'll understand—

MARY. Oh, we quite understand.

[*Exit Tadman.*

DICK. You've let me in for a pretty thing now—

MARY. You surely don't want me to apologise—

DICK. You'll have to one way or the other.

MARY. Indeed I shall not! Sign an apology for that woman to take about Warkinstall and show all my friends!

DICK. I'm not going to have a lawsuit. I shall go round to Tadman in the morning and get him to settle it.

MARY. Tadman? He's on their side. You can see that. I shall consult Mr. Galpin—(*Felix re-enters.*) Oh, Mr. Galpin, I'm so sorry this has happened, but you'll be able to get us out of it, won't you?

[*Re-enter Chesher.*

FELIX. I'll do my best, as a friend—

MARY. No, we want you to act for us—

FELIX. Mr. Tadman is Mr. Whichello's lawyer—

MARY. Then you'll have to be mine.

FELIX. If Mr. Whichello wishes, but—

DICK. I'm not going to have a lawsuit.

FELIX. I'll take very good care you don't, if I handle the case.

MARY. There, Dick! And I'm not going to apologise.

FELIX. There 'll be no necessity, if I handle the case.

MARY. There, Dick! (*Dick utters a low, discontented growl. Mary goes to him.*) Now, Dick, don't be unreasonable. Mr. Galpin will arrange it so that I don't apologise, and that you don't have a lawsuit!

[*Is seen to be arguing with him.*

CHESHER (*in a low voice to Felix*). How are you going to manage it?

FELIX. I 'm hanged if I know. (*To Mary.*) It is n't very late. Shall we have just one rubber?

MARY. Oh, do!

[*Felix wheels the card-table into the centre of the room.*

FELIX. Uncle, you 'll take a hand. I 'm very sorry, Mrs. Whichello, that you and Whichello have had such an uncomfortable evening.

MARY. Oh, I 've enjoyed it thoroughly. Have n't you, Dick? (*Dick growls very discontentedly in his armchair.*) Dick, come up to the table and behave yourself. If you don't, I shall have to go and stay with Aunt Henrietta again. You won't like that. She won't have you near the place.

[*Dick growls again.*

FELIX (*spreading out a pack*). Shall we cut?

MARY (*cuts*). Now, Dick, come and cut, and think of something that will make you look happy!

DICK (*rises, growls, comes to the table*). What?

MARY. Think you 've got to take me home in your motor car, while poor Sir Thomas has got to take Lady Bodsworth!

(*Chesher has cut. Dick has cut. Mary cuts.*)

Two.

FELIX (*cuts*). Four. You and I, Mrs. Whichello. Where will you sit?

[*Shuffles the cards vigorously.*

MARY. Here.

[*Felix puts the cards he is shuffling before Dick, who cuts to Mary. Mary deals.*

DICK. You're sure you can keep me out of a lawsuit, Galpin?

FELIX (*vigorously shuffling the other cards*). If I handle the case. "Never go to law" is the advice I always give my clients. And up to the present I've kept them out of it.

MARY. And I shan't have to apologise?

FELIX. Never!

CHESHER. How much are we playing for?

DICK. Five shillings a hundred?

MARY. Oh, say ten. I'm thirsting for somebody's blood!

DICK (*groans*). You're going to draw mine if you don't take care!

MARY. Hold your tongue, Dick.

[*Ella enters from curtains and comes up to table.*

DICK. You'd better come round and see me in the morning.

FELIX. Right. What time?

DICK. Ten. No, I've got to play golf. I'm full up all day. (*To Mary.*) Why couldn't you keep your mouth shut?

MARY. Keep your cards up.

ELLA. What's the matter?

DICK. Mary is going to let me in for a lawsuit with the Bodsworths.

ELLA. What fun!

MARY. No trumps!

QUICK CURTAIN

(*Six weeks pass between Acts I and II.*)

ACT II

SCENE. *The same. About four o'clock on an afternoon in late February. The curtains are closely drawn, shutting out the further room. A bright fire is burning.*

Discover Felix with four or five dictionaries on table in front of him; one is open, and he is bending over it.

Enter Dakin, showing in Ella in pretty winter outdoor dress. Exit Dakin. Felix rises, takes Ella's hand, kisses her in silence.

FELIX. You 're a little late. I hope Mrs. Whichello won't be long. I 've had to leave the office and there 's only the boy.

ELLA. Mary 's coming on. Dick and she are having another row.

FELIX. Over the Bodsworth business?

ELLA. Naturally. There has been no other business in our house since the night of your dinner. Dick and Mary argue and argue and argue. Felix, when we 're married, we shan't be always arguing like that, shall we?

FELIX. Certainly not. I 'll do all my arguing in Court.

ELLA. It would be so dreadful, if we got quarrelling, just like ordinary married people.

FELIX. How can they do it? How can they do it?

ELLA. And Mary is so perfectly right, is n't she?

FELIX. Perfectly right.

ELLA. She can't give a written apology?

FELIX. Out of the question.

ELLA. If the Bodsworths take it into Court, we shall win, shan't we?

FELIX. We 've got to — somehow. This is my first im-

portant case, and I can't afford to lose it. Especially as I've just got the chance of another.

ELLA. Have you?

FELIX. Borrodaile was in my office this morning. He's inclined to fight the Church people over the new cemetery and crematorium.

ELLA. I hope he will. Did you encourage him?

FELIX. I said, "Never go to law. But," I said, "in this instance, I don't see how you can possibly lose."

ELLA. Yes, that's the way to put it.

FELIX. Oh, by the way — (*drawing a letter from his pocket and giving it to Ella*) — my uncle has promised to tide me over another year.

ELLA. Isn't he a brick! (*Reading.*) "I am persuaded that a young man with your flexible convictions is bound to succeed."

FELIX. He's a good judge of character. Read on. He's called to a consultation at Barsfield, so he's dropping in on his way back to town.

ELLA. Oh, yes. (*Reading.*) "So I shall be with you a little after three."

FELIX. Things are looking up at last —

ELLA. Yes, if you get the cemetery case — do you think you will?

FELIX. Well, Borrodaile is a stiff-necked old Radical. He hinted pretty strongly that he couldn't employ a Tory lawyer.

ELLA. Couldn't you — manage to drop being a Tory — just for the time?

FELIX. I've a jolly good mind to drop being a Tory altogether. Oh! I ought to have gone in for politics at the start! Look at my old chum, Harvey Betts —

ELLA. Yes. Mary wants to talk to you about him —

[*Enter Dakin, showing in Mary, smartly dressed in winter clothes.*

DAKIN (*announces*). Mrs. Whichello.

[*Exit Dakin.*

FELIX. How d' ye do?

MARY (*curtly*). How d' ye do? (*Barely shakes hands, and drops into a chair.*) I do think my husband is the most stupid, obstinate man on earth!

FELIX. Oh, not quite so bad as that, is he?

MARY (*decisively*). Now, Mr. Galpin, this affair of the Bodsworths must be brought to a head.

FELIX. Well, it seems to be shaping that way.

MARY. The question is whether you are on Dick's side or mine?

FELIX. On yours — certainly on yours.

MARY. Because Dick says you entirely agree with him that a lawsuit must be avoided.

FELIX. Oh, no, oh, no. My advice is, "Never go to law if you can possibly avoid it." But there are times when you can't possibly avoid it.

MARY. Well, Dick's coming on here directly —

FELIX. I must talk to him.

MARY. I hope you will. Because I may tell you plainly that if you wish to be engaged to Ella, you will insist to my husband that it would be a fatal step for me to apologise.

FELIX. I'll put that strongly to him.

MARY. You'd better, if you wish to marry Ella.

ELLA. Oh, I could n't think of giving him up! Could I, Felix?

MARY. My dear Ella, you could n't possibly marry Mr. Galpin if he gets your sister into a horrible mess, and makes her cave in to that dreadful old impropriety.

ELLA. But Felix won't, will you?

FELIX. You may rely I shall do everything in my power to convince Mr. Whichello.

MARY. Very well. If you bring Dick round to our way of thinking, I'll take care he gives his consent to your marriage with Ella as soon as this has all blown over.

ELLA. There, Felix. You will stick to Mary, won't you?

FELIX. I will, like a leech.

MARY. Then that 's settled. Now, Ella, I want to talk to Mr. Galpin. The motor 's outside. You go on to Carrick and Green's, and get your dress tried on. I 'll be there to try on mine as soon as you 've finished. Send the motor back for me.

ELLA. All right. (*Going to door. To Felix.*) Don't come down — no surrender! No apology! Down with the Bodsworths! Down with impropriety!

[*Exit Ella.*

MARY. Have you seen Mr. Tadman?

FELIX. Yes. He says the story is being repeated all over the town, and Lady Bodsworth is obliged to insist on the apology.

MARY. You told him I would n't sign?

FELIX. I said I would submit it to you, but I feared it would be useless. (*Draws a large blue envelope out of his pocket, takes out a blue paper and gives it to Mary, who reads it.*) Tadman is calling on Sir Thomas this afternoon for final instructions. He said he 'd look in here on his way up.

MARY (*having looked at the paper, gives a little shriek, reads a little further, gives a louder shriek*). Sign this? Why does n't she ask me to sweep her doorsteps?

[*About to tear it up.*

FELIX. No, don't tear it. I must show it to Whichello.

MARY. No, he might want me to sign it.

FELIX. Well, I must keep it for reference.

[*She gives him the paper.*

MARY. "Undertake not to repeat — "! When she 's going about telling everybody the most dreadful — there 's no other word — lies about it. The account she gave to the Petburys when they lunched there! Never mind! I gave Lady Petbury my version. I kept her laughing for an hour.

FELIX. I would n't say anything about it while there 's a lawsuit pending.

MARY. Not say anything about it? Oh, yes, I shall! Every day I think of something fresh!

FELIX. I hope you're careful to say nothing that isn't strictly accurate.

MARY. Accurate? You don't expect me to be accurate after the awful things she is saying about me?

FELIX. You must remember it will all be taken back to her.

MARY. Yes! That's exactly what I want. I thought of two perfectly fiendish additions yesterday —

FELIX. You haven't used them, I trust?

MARY. Yes, I went round to Mrs. Bratwick and told her. Mrs. Bratwick is her dearest friend, so I knew she'd go straight and tell the impropriety.

FELIX. You mustn't use that word —

MARY. Oh, everybody calls her that now. She'll never be known as anything else. Now, how soon shall we have a General Election?

FELIX. Within a few months — certainly within a year. What has that got to do with it?

MARY. Mr. Elkington's majority was only seventeen. They say he'll lose the seat next time.

FELIX. Most likely, I should say.

MARY. Dick has always been a Tory, but they're having dreadful rows on the Town Council about the new cemetery and the tramways. Dick is disgusted with them. I'm persuading him to turn Liberal.

FELIX. That wouldn't win us our lawsuit.

MARY. No, but — Mr. Harvey Betts, the Junior Liberal Whip, is a great friend of yours?

FELIX. Yes, we're old Carthusians. Harvey is a big man now. I wish I'd gone in for politics!

MARY. Couldn't you invite Mr. Betts down for a week-end?

FELIX. Oh, yes. But how would that serve us?

MARY. If Dick would only turn Liberal, and win the seat for them —

FELIX. What then?

MARY. There was an old baronetcy in the Whichello family. It has been extinct for over a hundred years —

FELIX. They 'd scarcely give Whichello a baronetcy for winning the Warkinstall seat.

MARY. No, not for merely winning the seat. But — aren't there other ways?

FELIX. What do you mean?

MARY. Don't they give baronetcies and peerages to people who subscribe to the party funds?

FELIX. Yes — but they have to fork out pretty heavily.

MARY. How much?

FELIX. Heaven only knows — and the party leaders.

MARY. Could n't you get Mr. Betts down and find out from him how much?

FELIX. Oh, I daresay Harvey would come. But to get a title you have to be deserving in other ways.

MARY. How deserving?

FELIX. Well, Bodsworth happened to be building a sanatorium, and it came in just handy for the Insurance Act.

MARY (*after a little thoughtful pause*). Dick shall give the town the new cemetery and crematorium! (*Suddenly bursts into laughter.*) Ha! ha! ha!

FELIX. What 's the matter?

MARY. Fancy Lady Bodsworth having to be cremated in our crematorium! Ha! ha! Or even only buried!

FELIX. At the rate we 're going on, it will cost us a lot before we do get rid of her.

MARY. Never mind! It has got to be done!

FELIX. I don't know what we 're going to let Whichello in for.

MARY. We 're going to let him in for a baronetcy.

FELIX. Yes, but will he stand the racket?

MARY. He 'll have to stand the racket. You aren't going to turn on his side, are you?

FELIX. No, but had n't we better tot up before we go any further? Now this lawsuit — suppose it goes against us?

MARY. It would n't cost very much, would it?

FELIX. Can't say. Some hundreds at least. A good deal would depend upon the impression you make on the jury.

MARY. Oh, I think I can manage that. Lady Bodsworth will have to appear, too?

FELIX. Of course.

MARY. In that wig? Oh, we shall romp in!

FELIX. Yes, but the other side will want to know exactly what you meant by "impropriety."

MARY. Well, what did I?

FELIX. Well, what did you?

MARY. You said you 'd look me up a meaning.

FELIX (*going to the dictionaries*). I asked McClintock to lend me his big etymological dictionary. He sent these in just before lunch.

[*Enter Dakin, showing in Chesher.*

CHESHER. How are you, Felix?

FELIX. How are you?

CHESHER. Mrs. Whichello — delighted to met you again!

[*Shaking hands.*

MARY. You 're paying us another visit?

CHESHER. I've just looked in for an hour on my way back to town. Everything going well? I hope that little affair with the Bodsworth has quite blown over?

FELIX. Not quite. Mrs. Whichello and I were just talking it over.

CHESHER. Then I 'm in the way.

[*Preparing to go.*

MARY. No, don't go. Perhaps you could help us.

CHESHER. Delighted. But how can I be of any use?

MARY. If you were on the jury, would you think "impropriety" a very dreadful word?

CHESHER. Well, it depends upon the way it was used — and who used it.

MARY. I used it. You remember that night of Mr. Galpin's dinner-party, and you remember how Lady

Bodsworth looked. Now, don't you think I was quite justified? (*Chesher does not answer.*) Under the circumstances?

CHESHER. Well, I shan't be on the jury.

MARY. No, but if you were? Tell me candidly.

CHESHER. What was the exact phrase?

FELIX (*quoting*). "With her powdered cheeks and her yellow hair, she looks like an impropriety."

MARY. Did I say that?

FELIX. Those were the exact words.

[*Referring to the blue paper.*

MARY. Are you quite sure? I know I used the word "impropriety," but, if I remember rightly, I didn't use it in any derogatory sense.

FELIX. Sir Thomas had the words taken down that night. Mrs. Tadman will swear to them, and they are prepared to subpœna Miss Southwood.

MARY. Ella? Ella doesn't remember exactly what I said, but she's quite sure I didn't mean anything horrid.

FELIX. Unfortunately Miss Southwood won't have to decide what you meant. The other side claim that "impropriety" means a — a — a lady of a certain class.

MARY. Oh, no! Oh, no! I didn't mean that.

FELIX. They will put it to the jury that you did.

MARY. Dr. Chesher, if you were on the jury, you wouldn't say that "impropriety" means — a — a — would you?

CHESHER. Isn't it a useful variant for —?

MARY. For what?

CHESHER. You know our English way. When we want to escape from a fact we escape from a word. When the fact turns up again, we escape to another word. In the end, we find we haven't abolished the fact. We have merely corrupted the English language.

MARY. I haven't corrupted the English language, have I? We must have some word for a — that sort of lady.

CHESHER. We had a good Bible and Shakespearian word, but it was too painfully exact to be applied, so we es-

caped to more pleasing substitutes. The early Victorian term was amiably descriptive, and carried a mild reproof.

MARY. What was that?

CHESHER. About eighteen-forty it was customary to speak of a "Fie! Fie!"

MARY. I never heard the word.

CHESHER. "Fille de joie" seems to be growing daily more appropriate, judging from the appearances of some of our fashionable restaurants. There are many other more or less suitable terms. Those who are curious in such lore may slake their thirst for knowledge in Parminter's "Dictionary of Polite Synonyms."

FELIX (*has been busy over the dictionaries*). We haven't yet decided what Mrs. Whichello meant by impropriety.

MARY. I meant — what do the dictionaries say it means?

FELIX (*reading from a dictionary*). "Impropriety: the quality of being improper. An erroneous, or unsuitable expression, act," etc.

(*Mary shakes her head.*)

(*Turning to another dictionary.*) "Impropriety: that which is improper." Quotation from Jane Austen.

CHESHER. Surely not!

FELIX. "Elizabeth had never been blind to the improprieties of her father's behaviour."

MARY. Well, I wasn't blind to the impropriety of Lady Bodsworth's behaviour. What else?

FELIX (*reading from another dictionary*). "Impropriety: indelicacy, unseemliness — "

MARY (*jumps at it*). "Unseemliness!" That's what I meant! No jury would give heavy damages for "unseemliness."

FELIX. You can never tell what a jury will do.

MARY. Dr. Chesher, if you were on the jury —

CHESHER. Ah, but I'm not.

MARY. But would you give heavy damages merely be-

cause I said that Lady Bodsworth's way of dressing her hair was unseemly?

CHESHER. Pardon me, was that exactly what you said?

MARY. Never mind what I said. That was what I meant. (*Chesher shows surprise.*) Surely I must know what I meant. And if you were on the jury, and I told you that all I meant was that Lady Bodsworth's hair was unseemly, would n't you believe me?

CHESHER. I 'm very much afraid I should.

MARY (*to Felix*). We 'll stick to unseemliness!

[*Enter Dakin.*

DAKIN. Mr. Tadman is below, sir.

FELIX. I 'll come down to him.

MARY. Could n't he come up here?

FELIX (*to Dakin*). Show Mr. Tadman up.

DAKIN. Yes, sir.

[*Exit Dakin.*

CHESHER. Felix, I shall be going up by the five-thirty. I 'll see you by-and-bye. (*To Mary.*) If I can't be of any further use —

MARY. You might stay and tell Mr. Tadman that if you were on the jury —

CHESHER (*shakes his head with a chuckle*). Ah, but I 'm not going to be.

[*Pops off.*

[*Exit Chesher, leaving door open. A moment later is heard to say, "How d' ye do?" Tadman's voice responds, "How d' ye do, Doctor?"*

FELIX (*to Mary*). Now, you will be careful with Tadman — don't repeat "impropriety."

MARY. No — "unseemliness."

FELIX. We might try a bit of bluff —

MARY. Yes. How?

FELIX. Sh!

[*Enter Dakin, announcing Tadman. Enter Tadman. Exit Dakin.*

TADMAN. How d' ye do, Mrs. Whichello?

MARY. How d' ye do?

TADMAN. How do again, Galpin?

FELIX. Take a seat, won't you?

TADMAN (*sitting*). I can't stay. Sir Thomas is expecting me. I hope Mrs. Whichello consents to an apology?

FELIX (*firmly*). I don't think so; eh, Mrs. Whichello?

MARY. Certainly not.

TADMAN. Then we must take it into Court?

FELIX. I suppose Sir Thomas and Lady Bodsworth fully realise what that means?

TADMAN. Pretty heavy damages, I should say.

FELIX. What for? Mrs. Whichello inadvertently makes a playful little comment on Lady Bodsworth—

TADMAN. Playful little comment!

FELIX. For which she expresses her deep regret. Lady Bodsworth refuses to accept our apologies, and insists on bringing it before a jury. Well, now, Tadman, are you really going to allow Lady Bodsworth to offer her hair and complexion to the contemplation of a jury? (*Mary gives a little chuckle.*) And so justify Mrs. Whichello's playful little comment?

TADMAN. I suppose Mrs. Whichello knows the implied meaning of impropriety?

MARY. Yes, it means "unseemliness." (*Tadman gives a derisive little grunt.*) It says so in the dictionary.

[*Tadman again gives a little grunt.*

FELIX. Mrs. Whichello will be delighted to explain to the jury exactly what she meant.

[*Tadman again gives a little grunt.*

MARY. I 'm longing to go into the box—simply longing.

FELIX. Our counsel will be instructed to treat the whole matter as a farce. He may perhaps suggest to Mrs. Whichello a few playful variations on the original theme.

TADMAN. That will increase our chance of getting heavy damages.

FELIX. Heavy damages? Why, you know, Tadman, this is just the sort of case that a judge and jury look upon

as a day's outing. Suppose Sparling gets hold of it! Heavy damages? You 'll get a farthing! And the next day all the papers will have chaffing articles on Lady Bodsworth's complexion, and she 'll be known all over the country as an impropriety — whatever that may mean. Is that what Sir Thomas wants? Just as he 's going up to get his title! You know best.

TADMAN (*rising*). Then Mrs. Whichello declines to sign the apology?

MARY. Positively!

TADMAN. I 'll tell Sir Thomas your decision.

[*Enter Dakin, announcing Mr. Whichello. Enter Dick. Exit Dakin. Dick is evidently in a ruffled temper.*

DICK (*curtly*). How d' ye do, Galpin? Ah, Tadman, I 'm very glad to find you here. (*Mary makes signs to Dick to be quiet. He takes no notice.*) Now, Tadman, this confounded thing has gone far enough. Can't we get it settled?

[*Mary gives a little shriek and shows intense annoyance.*

TADMAN. Nothing would please us better. I have handed Mr. Galpin a form of apology.

MARY (*decisively*). Which I shall not sign.

DICK (*impatiently*). Tsh! Tsh! Tsh!

(*Felix takes the form of apology from his pocket and gives it to Dick. Mary makes signs to Felix while Dick reads the apology.*)

(*Having read it.*) Yes — well, this is a bit stiff —

MARY. Stiff! It 's an insult, is n't it, Mr. Galpin?

DICK (*impatiently*). Tsh! Tsh! Tsh! (*To Tadman.*) I 've just seen Monkhouse, and he tells me that as an old friend of us both, he has got Sir Thomas to promise to meet me and talk this over amicably.

MARY. Mr. Galpin and I have decided upon a course of action —

DICK. Have you? Well, I have decided upon a course of action.

(*Mary in despair sits down, looks very obstinate, taps*

the ground impatiently with her feet, exchanges glances with Felix, and makes contemptuous gestures as Dick proceeds.)

Now, Tadman, will you tell Sir Thomas that I shall be pleased to talk this over in a friendly way?

TADMAN. Certainly. When and where?

DICK. This is neutral ground. If he would n't mind stepping round —

TADMAN. I 'll suggest that to Sir Thomas.

DICK. And if he 'll meet me over the apology, I 'll meet him over the tramways and the cemetery.

MARY. We must have a cemetery. And a crematorium.

DICK. Tsh! Tsh! Tsh! Bring him along. Galpin, I hope I may rely on you to help me arrange this with Sir Thomas.

FELIX. Certainly.

[*Rings bell.*

TADMAN (*takes up his hat and is going*). I 've no doubt Sir Thomas will be ready to listen to any proposal —

MARY. I daresay he will! Rather than allow Lady Bodsworth to go into the witness box with that very unseemly hair and complexion!

DICK (*angrily*). Mary!

[*Dakin appears at door.*

FELIX. The door, Dakin.

TADMAN (*to Dick*). I 'll take your message to Sir Thomas.

[*Exit Tadman, followed by Dakin.*

MARY. Well, my dear Dick, of all the silly, footling, stupid, absurd things you 've done in your life, this caps everything!

DICK. How so?

MARY. Just as Mr. Galpin and I had planned it all, you must needs come in and spoil everything!

DICK. Spoil what?

MARY. We 'd frightened Mr. Tadman into a blue funk. The Bodsworths would n't have dared to come into Court! You 'd have gone into Parliament. The old

baronetcy would have been revived — and then you blunder in, and give it all away!

[*Throws up her arms in despair, and walks about desperately.*

DICK. Old baronetcy? Nonsense! The Kellaton Whichellos were no connection of my family.

MARY. They must have been! Mr. Galpin, will you please trace out my husband's relationship to the Kellaton Whichellos?

DICK (*turns round on Felix*). Galpin, I hope you're no party to this silly scheme of my wife's?

MARY. Yes. Mr. Galpin was saying ten minutes ago, "If Whichello had any pluck he'd rouse himself and fight, and we could sweep the floor with the Bodsworths."

DICK. Galpin, you didn't say that?

FELIX. Not precisely in those words. But I do think Mrs. Whichello's plan is worth your consideration. If it could be carried out — mind you, I don't say that it could, but if it could, — it would place you in the leading position in Warkinstall.

MARY. Of course it would, and what are you now? What am I? You say yourself that Sir Thomas is sitting on you on the Town Council! He's sitting on everybody! If you don't take care, my dear Dick, you'll very soon be a cipher in Warkinstall!

DICK. That's all very well — but what can I do?

MARY. Rouse yourself! As Mr. Galpin says, "Fight him!" Fight him over the tramways! Fight him over the cemetery! Fight him over everything! Put up for Parliament —

DICK. Put up for Parliament — as a Liberal?

MARY. Why not? You don't believe in food taxes.

DICK. No, but I'm a staunch Tariff Reformer. That is, if the leather trade is properly considered.

MARY. You can't be a Tariff Reformer if you've read that little pamphlet I gave you. It proves that under

Tariff Reform we shall all be starving in six months. It quite convinced me.

DICK. But you canvassed for Elkington and Tariff Reform at the last election!

MARY. Well, next election I 'm going to canvass for you, and no food taxes. You surely don't mean to let the Bodsworths ride roughshod over us for the rest of our lives. Do have the courage of your convictions!

DICK. But I can't rat from the party —

MARY. It is n't ratting. It 's getting broader, more enlightened ideas; is n't it, Mr. Galpin?

FELIX. After all, Whichello, it 's only looking at things from a Liberal point of view instead of a Conservative. That 's all it amounts to.

DICK. But I shall have to give up my Club, and all my friends. It 's the only place in the town where I can get a decent game of billiards. By Jove, yes, and I shall have to hobnob with Borrodaile and all the dissenting set.

MARY. Well, they 're very nice — when you get to know them. And you need n't know them very much.

DICK. And what 's it going to cost? Lawsuit, baronetcy, Parliament — I should have to be in London three parts of my time — I should never get a round of golf — No, I 'm hanged if I do!

MARY. Very well, my dear Dick. Then Warkinstall will be simply impossible for me.

DICK (*after further deep reflection, says more emphatically*). No, I'm hanged if I do! No! We have n't long to live in this world! Do let us be happy, do let us be comfortable while we are here.

MARY. Comfortable! Going in second to Lady Bodsworth all my life! You don't call that being comfortable?

[*Enter Dakin.*

DAKIN (*to Mary*). Please, ma'am, Carrick and Green have rung up to ask if you wish to try on your dress before the light goes.

MARY. I 'll come at once. (*Exit Dakin.*) So if that 's

your decision, Dick, we had better let our house here, and move up to London.

DICK. What for?

MARY. I cannot live in a town where I am constantly trampled under foot by a yellow-haired — unseemliness.

DICK. Nonsense! You run along and try on your dress.

MARY. Mr. Galpin, I shan't be long. Please see that nothing is settled in my absence. (*He is accompanying her.*) No — please stay and try to rouse my husband to a sense of his duty to himself.

[*Exit Mary.*

DICK (*turns round on Felix*). Now, Galpin, what's the meaning of this?

FELIX. Meaning of what?

DICK. I thought you were on my side.

FELIX. So I am! So I am!

DICK. But Mrs. Whichello says you are advising her it will have to go into Court.

FELIX. No! No! Not if we can possibly keep it out.

DICK. I'm quite determined I'll keep it out.

FELIX. Quite right! "Never go to law." But there are times in every man's life when he feels that —

DICK. Yes. Well, this is one of the times in my life when I don't feel like that at all.

FELIX. When he feels that he owes it to his own dignity to —

DICK. I don't feel I owe a ha'penny to my own dignity. And I'll take jolly good care I don't owe a thousand pounds or two to you lawyers — if I can help it.

FELIX. I'm ready to carry out your instructions. At the same time, I may point out to you one or two facts —

DICK. Yes. Well, let me point out to you one or two facts. The first fact is, I'm Miss Southwood's guardian. The second fact is, I've got control of her money till she's twenty-five. The third fact, I've made up my mind I won't have a lawsuit with the Bodsworths.

[*Emphasises his words by bringing his fist on the table.*

FELIX. Oh, I'm quite with you — quite.

DICK. Now you wish to be engaged to Miss Southwood, don't you?

FELIX. With your consent.

DICK. Very well. Then I'll give you a very straight tip. You get me out of this mess with the Bodsworths, and persuade my wife to give up this silly nonsense of going into Parliament, and getting a baronetcy, and when you propose for Miss Southwood I shall most likely say yes. What do you say?

FELIX. Oh, certainly, certainly.

DICK. I may rely on you?

FELIX. Absolutely.

[*Looks very uncomfortable.*

DICK. That's all right then. I shall leave Mrs. Whichello entirely in your hands. (*Felix's face drops and grows longer and longer as Dick proceeds.*) My wife is the dearest little woman in the world. But when once she gets an idea in her head, she is the most aggravating, unreasonable, won't-let-you-have-any-peace-till-she-gets-it creature that ever breathed.

FELIX. She is rather persistent.

DICK. Good Lord, yes! You've no idea what my life has been the last six weeks. I haven't had a moment's peace. That's why I think it will be better for you to take her in hand.

FELIX (*getting more uncomfortable*). I very much question the wisdom of my interfering.

DICK. Oh, there won't be any interfering. I shall simply stand aside, and give you carte blanche to bring her round to her senses. The fact is, Galpin, I know jolly well that if she keeps on at me, I shall find myself let in for the lawsuit, and the baronetcy, and all the rest of it, before I know where I am. That's why I want you to come in as a buffer.

FELIX. It's rather a ticklish thing to come in between man and wife.

DICK. So it is, as a rule. But this is just one of those cases where a third party can step in and ease off the friction.

FELIX. Well, I'll do my best, but—

DICK. That's a dear, good chap. I knew you would. I'm much obliged to you. You pull this off, and then come and ask me for Ella. (*Offers his hand, shakes hands with Felix cordially.*) I feel a load is off my mind. (*Looks at his watch.*) She'll be an hour fiddling over her dress. Now, let's look alive and fix this up with Bodsworth and Tadman while she's out of the way. (*Mary enters.*) Hillo! Hillo! I thought you were trying on your dress—

MARY. I was so much upset I could n't fix my mind on it. It flashed upon me that if I was n't here, you would simply lie down and ask Sir Thomas to walk over you.

DICK (*getting angry*). I'm not going to let Bodsworth or any other man walk over me.

MARY. Yes, you will, my dear Dick, if I'm not here.

DICK. You toddle back again to Carrick and Green's and try on your dress.

[*Mary replies by seating herself calmly. Dick looks in despair at Felix, and makes a mute appeal for help.*

FELIX (*after a little hesitation*). Perhaps you and I might run round to Sir Thomas.

DICK. Yes—

[*Preparing to go.*

MARY. He's here. I saw his motor coming round the corner.

[*Enter Dakin.*

DAKIN. Sir Thomas and Mr. Tadman are in the morning-room, sir. Shall I show them up?

DICK. We'll go down to them, Galpin—

[*Moving toward door.*

MARY (*rising*). Yes.

DICK. No, you'd better stay here—eh, Galpin?

FELIX (*to Mary*). Perhaps you'd better let us open up the question. We'll refer everything to you as we go along.

MARY (*firmly*). No, Mr. Galpin. You know Dick's good nature. He 's no match for a strong, determined man like Sir Thomas.

DICK. I 'm no match for Bodsworth?

MARY. No, my dear Dick, you know you aren't. He 'll make you say and do just whatever he pleases.

DICK. Oh, will he? We shall see. (*To Dakin.*) Please show Sir Thomas and Mr. Tadman up.

MARY. No, Dakin —

[*Looks appealingly at Felix.*

FELIX (*to Dakin, who is going*). One moment, Dakin. (*To Mary.*) Suppose you and I just step into the next room. (*With a sly, persuading look and half-wink at her, unseen by Dick.*) We shall then be able to follow the course of the negotiations —

[*With another sly, persuading look and half-wink, coaxing her off.*

MARY (*moving a reluctant step toward curtains*). I don't like listening.

FELIX. No, neither do I, but — (*another look and half-wink*) — we can better keep an eye on the situation. (*With another look and wink. Mary goes up to curtains and passes through reluctantly. To Dakin.*) Show Sir Thomas and Mr. Tadman up. Don't mention that Mrs. Whichello is here.

[*Exit Dakin.*

DICK (*in a whisper to Felix*). Keep her quiet!

(*Felix throws Dick a confident glance of assurance, and a half-wink; goes through curtains. Left alone, Dick shakes his head dubiously, as if dissatisfied with the situation, goes up to curtains, calls out to Mary.*)

Now, Mary, please let me have a quiet five minutes with Bodsworth, and don't interrupt.

MARY (*within*). All right, I'll look out of the window.

DICK (*suspicious*). Galpin, just see that we 're not disturbed, there 's a good fellow.

(*He shakes his head again, very doubtfully. Enter Dakin, showing in Sir Thomas and Mr. Tadman. Exit Dakin. Dick goes to Sir Thomas very cordially, offers his hand.*) Ah, Sir Thomas, I 'm delighted to meet you — (*Sir Thomas, stolid and rather cold, shakes hands.*) Our old friend Monkhouse wants us to make this up. He says you are quite willing.

SIR THOMAS. I 'm ready to discuss the matter. Mr. Galpin is not here?

DICK (*glancing nervously round at curtains*). I 've asked him to let you and me have a quiet five minutes together. (*Drawing Sir Thomas away from the curtains and speaking in a low voice.*) Now, you and I are sensible men, Bodsworth, aren't we?

SIR THOMAS. I have always prided myself upon my good sense, and the clear view I take of things.

DICK. And I hope I 'm not an utter ass. Well, let us start from that platform, and work from that.

TADMAN. An excellent platform! Two sensible men! Work from that!

DICK (*glancing nervously at curtains; drawing Sir Thomas further away; dropping his voice still lower*). Now, between ourselves, old friend, if our wives choose to quarrel, there 's no reason that you and I should be fools enough to follow suit, and make ourselves the laughing-stock of the town.

SIR THOMAS. I am not accustomed to regard myself as a laughing-stock.

DICK. No! No! (*Dropping his voice again, always with a nervous eye on the curtains.*) But folks are laughing at us, aren't they, Tadman?

TADMAN. They are taking that view of it.

DICK. I 've never been so much chaffed in my life. And they 'll laugh more if we 're fools enough to go to law.

SIR THOMAS. I am quite prepared to arrange it.

DICK. Very well. Then — (*dropping his voice*) — we agree to settle it amicably.

SIR THOMAS. On a satisfactory basis.

DICK. Of course, on a satisfactory basis. (*Whispering.*) The great thing is, we don't go to law. Let's shake hands on that.

[*Offering hand; they shake hands, Dick very cordially.*

TADMAN. That's what I advised on the night — arrange it amicably.

DICK. So you did, Tadman. Well, we have arranged it amicably. Now — (*dropping his voice to a coaxing whisper and drawing them toward him*) — let's all meet at the Club in an hour's time, and settle the details over a bottle of champagne. I'll bring Galpin on.

SIR THOMAS. I have promised Lady Bodsworth that no step shall be taken without her knowledge.

DICK (*upset*). Oh! (*Dropping his voice.*) I don't think that's wise! (*Coaxing.*) Had n't we better fix it up at the Club, and tell our wives afterwards? You can send Tadman on to tell Lady Bodsworth, and I'll send Galpin on to tell Mrs. Whichello. And you and I can stay on at the Club, and have a little friendly dinner together, eh?

SIR THOMAS (*firmly*). I have given my pledge to Lady Bodsworth to settle nothing without her. She is waiting in the motor outside. I had better bring her up.

[*Making a little movement toward door.*

DICK. I don't think I would! (*Coming up very cautiously to Sir Thomas, speaking in a nervous whisper.*) Can't we all pop down to the Club —

SIR THOMAS (*getting very suspicious, speaks loudly*). Pop down to the Club? Why should we pop down to the Club? We are doing nothing to be ashamed of, I hope?

DICK. No, no —

SIR THOMAS. Then why do you speak in whispers? Don't you wish everything to be open and above-board?

DICK. Oh, yes, oh, yes —

SIR THOMAS. Then, as Lady Bodsworth is the insulted party —

DICK. Oh, not insulted —

SIR THOMAS. Not insulted? She is designated as an "impropriety," and she is not insulted?

DICK. Well, we need n't go into that just now —

SIR THOMAS. But that is precisely what we must go into. And if you wish to settle it amicably —

DICK. I do, I do. But I do think that Lady Bodsworth's presence — eh, Tadman?

TADMAN. I don't see how we can arrive at any understanding without Lady Bodsworth's sanction.

SIR THOMAS. Certainly not. Nor shall I be any party to "popping into the Club," or any underhand negotiations whatever. Lady Bodsworth and I are willing to discuss the matter — without prejudice —

TADMAN (*to Dick*). You won't get a better chance to settle, Whichello.

SIR THOMAS. Then with Galpin's permission I will bring her up. Where is Galpin?

DICK. He 'll be here directly. He popped into the next room at my request.

SIR THOMAS (*growing more suspicious*). "Popped into the next room"? I don't like all this "popping" into next rooms, and "popping" into Clubs. Galpin had better be present if we are to come to a settlement. I 'll fetch Lady Bodsworth.

[*Exit Sir Thomas.*

DICK (*approaches Tadman; in a cautious whisper*). I got Galpin to take my wife into the next room.

[*Indicating curtains.*

TADMAN. There?

DICK. Yes. She 's better out of the way. Now, Tadman, you 're an old friend —

TADMAN. Certainly.

DICK (*glancing nervously round at curtains*). Well, let 's look alive and fix this up amicably. You 'll help me, won't you?

TADMAN. Certainly.

DICK. Thanks. And if Galpin can only manage to keep her quiet for ten minutes —

[*The curtains are moved aside, and Felix is seen to be restraining Mary from coming in.*

FELIX. We can keep an eye on the situation in here.

MARY (*entering in spite of him*). I prefer to keep an eye on the situation in here. (*Looks at Dick for two or three moments with an air of benevolent contempt and a little shrug.*) Well, my dear Dick, so you 've bungled it again!

DICK (*getting angry*). Bungled it! Oh, no, I have n't! I 'm going to settle this amicably! (*Tapping the table emphatically with each word.*) D' ye see? Whether you like it or whether you don't, I 'm going to settle it amicably!

[*Again tapping the table.*

MARY (*serene*). Very well, my dear Dick, settle it amicably.

DICK. I 'm going to!

[*With an emphatic nod of the head.*

[*Lady Bodsworth enters, followed by Sir Thomas. She has discarded her light wig, and her hair is now plainly brushed, of a dark-brown colour, with a suspicion of being dyed. Her complexion is not made up, and is rather pale and pasty. The result is a startling change in her appearance. Dick has a little shock, and turns away to recover himself. Felix has also a shock, which he conceals as quickly as possible. Mary gives a gaspy little chuckle, and turns to Felix, who admonishes her to silence by a warning look. Mary immediately controls herself into preternatural gravity, but every now and then steals a sly look at Felix and nudges him very slightly with her elbow to look at Lady Bodsworth.*

FELIX (*offering hand*). How d' ye do, Lady Bodsworth? (*Lady Bodsworth takes his hand coldly.*) Do please be seated.

[*Lady Bodsworth remains standing.*

DICK. How d' ye do, Lady Bodsworth?

LADY BODSWORTH (*very self-conscious, preserving a stern dignity*). I am quite well, I thank you.

DICK. Sir Thomas and I have made up our minds as old friends to settle this amicably.

LADY BODSWORTH. Of course, if you wish to apologise. (*Looking at Mary.*) I was not aware, when I came up, that I should be called upon to meet —

MARY (*looking at her, nods and speaks very sweetly*). How d' ye do? You 'll pardon me for not recognising you at first, now that you 're — (*looking at her*) — now that you 're not — not so blond as you were.

[*Lady Bodsworth gathers herself up with wrathful dignity and looks at Sir Thomas.*

SIR THOMAS. Whichello, if you wish to settle this amicably, you had better request Mrs. Whichello not to make any further remarks.

DICK. Ye—es. (*Looks imploringly at Mary, who is demure and determined — looks at Tadman and Felix for support.*) Had n't we better pop down — adjourn to the Club?

LADY BODSWORTH. I think as I have been insulted, I have a right to be present.

[*Looks at Sir Thomas.*

SIR THOMAS. Certainly. Now, Whichello, Tadman and I are ready to listen to what you propose.

MARY. One moment, Sir Thomas. Something has just occurred to me — I should like to consult Mr. Galpin — please excuse me —

(*She draws Felix aside, and is seen to be arguing a point; he shakes his head and demurs; she urges the point more strongly — he still endeavours to quiet her. Dick shows great irritation, and makes signs to her and Felix. To Felix.*) Yes! Yes! (*To Sir Thomas.*) Please excuse us a moment. It 's most important. (*To Felix.*) Mr. Galpin, please ask Sir Thomas —

FELIX. We need n't raise that question at present —

MARY. Yes. Sir Thomas and Lady Bodsworth have a right to know —

DICK (*very much irritated*). Galpin, don't let's mess about with any trumpery details. Let's get on to the main point, and settle it.

MARY. My dear Dick, this is the main point. Mr. Galpin, please explain to Sir Thomas —

[*Felix again tries to dissuade her in dumb show.*

SIR THOMAS. Now, Galpin, my time is precious. What is this point that Mrs. Whichello has raised?

FELIX (*does not like the job*). Mrs. Whichello says that, if this case should unfortunately come into Court, — which we hope may be avoided, — would Lady Bodsworth appear before the jury as she is now, or as she appeared on the night —

[*Lady Bodsworth utters an indignant exclamation and looks at Sir Thomas.*

MARY. It would n't be fair not to give the jury an opportunity of judging —

SIR THOMAS (*expands and explodes*). Really — upon my word — I have never — Tadman, it's useless for us to remain any longer. Fanny!

[*Prepares to go.*

DICK (*stopping him*). No, Bodsworth, no! There's no need to get in a temper! You and I are sensible men! Let's talk it over quietly, as sensible men! Tadman, explain to Sir Thomas —

[*He urges Tadman to mollify Sir Thomas. Tadman goes to Sir Thomas and Lady Bodsworth, and is seen to be soothing them. Dick goes to Felix and Mary, and is seen to be arguing with Mary, and begging her to keep quiet. The two groups hold a little conference apart from each other, and are seen to be talking it over.*

TADMAN. Now, Whichello, Sir Thomas will hear what you propose —

SIR THOMAS. Without prejudice.

DICK. Well, first of all, I should be disposed to give in to Sir Thomas over the tramways —

SIR THOMAS. A very sensible determination.

DICK (*irritated by Sir Thomas's tone*). You think so? Well, I don't. Still, to avoid a row here, and a row in the Council —

SIR THOMAS. There need be no row if you stick to your principles, Whichello, instead of playing into the hands of the Liberal Party.

DICK (*getting a little angry*). Playing into the hands of the Liberal Party?

SIR THOMAS. As you have been doing for the last six months.

DICK. Good heavens! The town wants the tramways badly enough —

TADMAN. Better leave that question, Whichello. You wish to settle this matter amicably.

DICK (*grudgingly*). Well, I 'll give in over the tramways. And I 'll give in over the cemetery and the crematorium. And I call that a very handsome offer. Especially as the old churchyard is only a quarter of a mile above my factory, and a precious damp hole into the bargain.

SIR THOMAS. I must ask you not to speak disrespectfully of the hallowed spot where I intend to be buried.

MARY. Dick, you ought not to object to Sir Thomas getting buried where he likes.

DICK (*turns round on her savagely*). Will you please keep quiet. He may get buried whenever and wherever he pleases — for all I care. It 's a mouldy, unwholesome bog, and it ought to be shut up. But rather than keep on having these perpetual rows over it, I 'm willing to drop the new cemetery.

MARY. May I ask a question?

DICK (*fiercely*). No! For heaven's sake be quiet for five minutes, and let 's get this settled.

MARY. But, my dear Dick, if we don't have a new ceme-

tery, where are all the patients from Sir Thomas's sanatorium to be buried?

[*Sir Thomas and Lady Bodsworth show great anger. Tadman quiets them down.*

DICK (*has turned fiercely on Mary*). Will you please hold your tongue? You've got me into this confounded muddle, and now you — (*Sees Felix, who has been standing quiet and impassive; turns savagely on him.*) Galpin, are you acting for me in this matter, or are you not?

FELIX. Yes —

DICK. Well, what are you standing there for? Why on earth don't you back me up, and help me get this settled?

FELIX. If you'll give me your instructions —

DICK. I have given you my instructions. Good heavens! If you're going to act for me, act for me, and don't stand there with your hands in your pockets! Act for me!

FELIX. Tadman, Mr. Whichello has made very liberal concessions over the tramways and the cemetery. I hope Sir Thomas considers them satisfactory.

SIR THOMAS. Quite satisfactory, so far as they go.

[*Dick gives an unconciliatory growl.*

FELIX. In return for these concessions, Mr. Whichello expects certain concessions on your side — which he will now formulate.

[*Looks at Dick.*

TADMAN. Now, Whichello —

DICK. Well, of course you'll agree to drop the lawsuit, and draw in over the apology; and I think Sir Thomas might let us have the slope under the sanatorium grounds for the golf club — at a valuation.

SIR THOMAS. Quite impossible. I consider that Englishmen waste far too much time on golf —

DICK. Oh, you do? I suppose I'm the best judge of how I waste my time.

SIR THOMAS. Certainly. But if you were more often in your place on the Town Council, supporting me —

DICK. Supporting you?

SIR THOMAS. Instead of playing into the hands of the Liberal Party when you do come —

DICK (*thoroughly roused*). When I do come I 'm going to vote for what I think right and proper, and I 'm going to support just whom I jolly well please!

[*Walking about, comes toward Mary.*

MARY (*in a low tone to Dick*). He 's walking over you!

DICK. Support you? Good Lord, you walk about like a little tin god, and you think you 've got the town in your pocket! Support you? I 'll let you see that you 're not going to boss everybody and everything any longer! Warkinstall does n't belong to you, does it? Support you? I 'm going to support the tramways, and I 'm going to support the new cemetery; so if you mean to be buried in that hole you 'll have to look sharp about it, or we shall cremate you before you know you 're dead!

SIR THOMAS. Very well. At the next meeting of the Conservative Association, I shall move that you are called upon to explain your action, or resign.

DICK. Resign? I do resign! I have resigned! Play into the hands of the Liberal Party? By Jove, I will! Galpin, will you see Borrodaile and the rest of them on my behalf, and say that if they consider me a suitable candidate, I shall be pleased to fight the town at the next election on Liberal principles! And a jolly stiff fight I shall put up, I assure you!

SIR THOMAS. Tadman, we need n't wait any longer — Fanny!

LADY BODSWORTH. There 's nothing been said about the apology.

SIR THOMAS. We shall not accept an apology. Tadman, you will issue the writ at once. My wife an impropriety? We will see what a British jury says to that!

DICK (*fiercely*). We will see!

MARY (*serenely*). We will see!

SIR THOMAS. Good-afternoon, Galpin.

[*Bows to Mary.*

FELIX. Good-afternoon, Sir Thomas.

[*Rings bell.*

TADMAN. Good-day, Galpin. Good-day, Whichello. (*Dick nods curtly.*) Good-afternoon, Mrs. Whichello.

MARY. Oh, Mr. Tadman, one moment. (*Appeals to Felix.*) Mr. Galpin, we shall have a right to demand that the jury see the original coiffure—

[*Glancing at Lady Bodsworth, who utters a little shriek and makes a hurried exit. Sir Thomas glares at Mary, and exit after Lady Bodsworth.*

FELIX. Certainly; I 'm afraid, Tadman, our counsel will have to press Lady Bodsworth to oblige us on that point.

TADMAN. Oh, very well. Good-day.

[*Exit Tadman. Dick has seated himself, and has grown much calmer.*

MARY (*enthusiastically*). Well, my dear Dick, I do congratulate you! (*Kissing him heartily.*) You 've come to your senses at last!

DICK. Oh, I 'm in for it now.

MARY. Yes. (*Excitedly.*) Now, we must n't waste any time. Mr. Galpin, you 'll be our election agent—

FELIX. Delighted!

MARY. Write to Mr. Harvey Betts, and ask him to come down for the first week-end he can spare.

FELIX. Right.

MARY. Dick, you must join the Liberal Club—

DICK. Yes, of course. I 'm in for it now.

MARY. You 'd better give them some weekly political addresses.

DICK. Good Lord, what about?

FELIX. Don't you worry. I 'll write out your addresses.

MARY. Who 's the best counsel we can get for the lawsuit?

FELIX. Clapperton. He 'll chaff Lady Bodsworth into a fit, and chaff the whole case out of Court.

MARY. Wire and retain him. (*Felix sits down and hurriedly writes a telegram.*) Look cheerful, Dick!

DICK (*getting very gloomy*). Oh, I 'm in for it now, and I 'm going to see it through.

MARY. Of course you are. Ella shall drop in on Mrs. Bratwick, and mention that we 're determined to have Lady Bodsworth in full fig at the trial. Mrs. Bratwick will take it to the impropriety, and then — What 's the matter, Dick?

DICK. Nothing — nothing. I 'm thinking it over.

MARY. Well, look cheerful.

FELIX (*having written telegram*). Yes, buck up, Whichello — we 'll see you through.

DICK. Oh, I 'm in for it now — and I 'm not going to draw back.

MARY. Draw back?

DICK. I say I shan't.

MARY. I should think not! (*Having glanced at telegram which Felix has held out before her.*) Yes — send it off at once. (*Felix rings bell.*) And please hunt up all about Dick's pedigree and his claims to the Whichello baronetcy.

DICK. Baronetcy?

MARY. Yes. Look cheerful! Look cheerful! Look cheerful, Sir Richard!

CURTAIN

(*Three weeks pass between Acts II and III.*)

ACT III

SCENE. *The same. About ten in the morning. The room much as in the last act.*

Discover Felix and Harvey Betts, each with a local paper in his hand. Harvey Betts is an alert, smart, youthful-looking aristocrat of thirty-five, with very bright, easy-going manners, and dressed in the very latest fashion.

FELIX. Hillo, Harvey — they 're tickling you — (*Reads from his paper.*) "Great interest attaches to the visit to our ancient borough of Mr. Harvey Betts, the brilliant young statesman, who has recently been appointed one of the whips of the Liberal Party. His presence amongst us sets the Government seal of approval upon our esteemed fellow-townsman, Mr. Richard Whichello, as Liberal Candidate at the next general election." What does the Tory rag say?

BETTS (*reading*). "The desperate straits to which the Liberal Party is reduced in Warkinstall may be inferred from the fact that the blustering and blundering ratters, Whichello and Galpin" — (*digging Felix*) — "the blustering and blundering ratters — have been obliged to summon to their aid the preposterous dandy who has recently been pitchforked on to the Treasury Bench as Junior Whip. We shall see what the hard-headed, sturdy, common-sense workingmen of Warkinstall have to say to this egregious 'nut' without any kernel."

FELIX (*reading*). "The chairman, Mr. Bloxam Borrodaile, opened the meeting with a magnificent display of Boanerges eloquence which somewhat overshadowed the cautious and modest oratorical effort made by Mr. Whichello. Mr. Harvey Betts then followed with a lively attack upon the whole Tory position, which was

left a crumbled mass of ruins. No less damaging was the vigorous onslaught made by Mr. Felix Galpin, who is rapidly becoming one of the rising hopes of the Liberal Party in Warkinstall. But the loudest cheers of the evening were reserved for our own Mary, as all true Liberals delight to call her. In a few terse and witty remarks she indicated some local Tory leaders who would have the first claim to be accommodated in the new cemetery and crematorium which Mr. Whichello is presenting to the town."

BETTS (*reading*). "After the pitiable exhibition of his muddle-headed views which the turncoat Whichello made last evening, every self-respecting Conservative must rejoice that this incapable and incoherent wobbler has left the honest party. Straightforward, clear-sighted patriots will no longer have occasion to blush for this maundering renegade." I say, old man, you wrote me Whichello was a jolly good candidate.

FELIX. So he is. He has got six hundred workmen. What's the matter with him?

BETTS. He's the rankest duffer of a mugwump I ever met. He's shaky on Free Trade; he's shaky on Home Rule; he's shaky on Universal Suffrage; he's shaky on the whole bally bag of tricks.

FELIX. He has just ratted from the Tories, you know.

BETTS. Well, when a man rats, let him rat, and make no bones about it. Now I call you a good ratter.

FELIX. No mistake about me, eh? Rising hope of the Warkinstall Liberals — eh?

[*Pointing enthusiastically to himself.*

BETTS. You're all right. But what a ghastly mess Whichello made last night.

FELIX. He was pretty awful.

BETTS. I thought you had him in tow —

FELIX. I wrote out his speech and coached him all yesterday afternoon. Then he never spoke a word of it.

BETTS. Tell you what, old man, we shall have to put some

ginger into Whichello, or we shall come a howling cropper.

FELIX. Oh, he'll be right enough. You let Mrs. Whichello know where you want to find Whichello, and she'll take care he's on the spot.

BETTS. I wish we could run her. I'm in love with our own Mary. If it weren't for our own Mary I should drop Whichello like a hot potato. (*Dropping his voice.*) I say, old man, she keeps on digging at me for a baronetcy.

FELIX. You'll be able to manage it?

BETTS (*shakes his head*). It rests with the Chief. We've been chucking about a lot of peerages and baronetcies lately. What's this old Whichello baronetcy she keeps on bringing up? (*Felix gives a shrug and grimace.*) Nothing in it — eh?

FELIX. Oh, there was one; and she says Whichello is the heir.

BETTS (*cunningly*). I suppose he'll plank down a pretty big lump for the party war-chest?

FELIX. Oh, yes. He's pretty warm.

BETTS. The question is, how much will he stand? I must have a chat with him.

FELIX. I wouldn't. Take my tip. Settle the tariff with her, and leave her to bring Whichello to the scratch.

[*With a little wink at Betts.*

BETTS. Right. Whichello will be here directly.

[*Taking out his watch.*

FELIX. You're taking him on to meet Ben Chorley?

BETTS. Yes, the Socialists mean to be nasty. Chorley talks about running himself.

FELIX. He stands no earthly chance.

BETTS. No, but he can queer us. You may as well come on with us and see Chorley.

FELIX. Better not.

BETTS. Why not?

FELIX. I've been going about saying that the Liberal Party is the only bulwark against Socialism.

BETTS. What on earth made you say a damned silly thing like that?

FELIX. I had to say it. Socialism is a red rag to Borrodaile. You 'd better not get in too deep with Chorley.

BETTS. My boy, we 've got to win the seat, have n't we? You 'll have to hedge over Socialism.

FELIX. We must keep in with Borrodaile —

BETTS. We must muzzle Chorley.

FELIX. Very well. You tackle Chorley, and I 'll butter Borrodaile.

BETTS. Right! Borrodaile, your pal — Chorley, mine.

[*Enter Dakin, showing in Mary. Exit Dakin.*

MARY (*to Felix, shaking hands*). Good-morning. (*To Betts.*) Good-morning, Mr. Betts.

[*Shaking hands.*

BETTS. Good-morning.

MARY. My husband will be here in a moment. I must speak to you before he comes — No, don't go, Mr. Galpin — it 's about the baronetcy —

BETTS. Yes, but you know I 'm only an understrapper. I 'm the little boy who blows the organ. The Chief plays the tune. And the Chief is very touchy about the way these things are done. We 've got to put on our moral frock coats and top hats, and avoid scandals.

MARY. But could n't you give me some idea —

BETTS. Of what?

MARY. Of how much it costs — for a baronetcy.

BETTS. Costs? The Chief's hair would turn white at the bare idea of any traffic in honours. There must be no bargain. But if Whichello wins the seat for us — and comes down handsomely for the party funds —

MARY. Yes —

BETTS. The Chief is too good a chap to let his patriotism go unrewarded.

MARY. But you must remember that we already have a baronetcy in the Whichello family.

BETTS. Just now I don't fancy that would appeal so much

to the Chief as hard cash. And if I could mention a tidy good round figure—

[*Watching her closely.*

MARY. Oh, that will be all right. Quite all right. But Dick has got one of his stingy fits on. And he's in a very bad temper this morning. He's going to question you about the exact amount. You will give him some quite low estimate, so as not to upset him prematurely?

BETTS. But suppose he nails me to it afterwards?

MARY. Oh, he won't, will he, Mr. Galpin?

FELIX. I don't think Whichello is going to have much say in the matter.

MARY. Not when it comes to the crisis. You will mention quite a low figure— (*Betts demurs, and half shakes his head.*) Dear Mr. Betts, you must allow me to know him— Dick's the best husband in the world, but in money matters he always needs a—a—jumping-board, before he takes the plunge.

BETTS. You're sure he'll jump when the time comes?

MARY. Oh, yes; won't he, Mr. Galpin?

FELIX. Like an antelope. I've seen him do it.

BETTS. Well, I'll put the matter before the Chief when I get back. I'm afraid a baronetcy may be doubtful. But the Chief might mention Whichello for a knighthood—

MARY (*offended*). Knighthood? They give knighthoods to persons like the Bodsworths, and railway directors, and actors, and all sorts of people. We could n't think of a knighthood.

BETTS. Well, we've got to win the seat first. Then we can talk about the trimmings.

MARY. And you will give Dick quite a low temporary estimate as a jumping-board? (*Betts looks doubtful.*) He will jump when the time comes.

BETTS. All right. Rely on me.

[*Enter Dakin, showing in Dick, with paper in his pocket. Enter Dick. Exit Dakin.*

DICK (*to Betts*). Good-morning.

BETTS (*shaking hands*). Good-morning.

DICK. How are you, Galpin?

FELIX. First rate.

DICK (*in a state of great irritation, pulling out paper*). I say, I didn't go and make such a doddering ass of myself last night, did I? (*They are silent.*) Did I, Galpin?

FELIX. You weren't quite in your best fighting form.

DICK. No. Your speech went clean out of my head. But I got on very well, didn't I? (*They are silent.*) Anyway, I pulled up towards the end — Didn't I? Well, at any rate, I didn't make such a blathering idiot of myself as all this — (*pointing to paper*) — did I?

MARY (*trying to take the paper away from him*). You got on very well, indeed. I felt quite proud of you —

DICK (*keeping the paper*). I don't want your opinion. You've done nothing but egg me on from the first. What I want to know is this — did I make a silly jackass fool of myself last night, or did I not? I know jolly well I didn't. (*Throwing away the paper contemptuously.*) And I tell you this — I'm fed up with the whole business and the whole gang. Now, Mr. Betts, before you go any further I want to know what this is going to cost?

BETTS. Hadn't we better postpone that?

DICK. No. I'm not going to land myself in deuce knows what expense just for the pleasure of seeing B-a-r-t. stuck after my name. (*To Betts.*) So if you please, you and I will have two minutes in private. Galpin, can we step in there?

FELIX. Certainly.

DICK (*turning to Mary*). And you kindly keep out of this. If I am going to be fleeced, I'll know how much. Now, Mr. Betts —

[*Betts and Mary exchange a cheerful look of understanding as Dick goes up to curtains. Exeunt Betts and Dick through curtains.*

MARY (*watching them off*). That 's all right. I shall have all the summer to get Dick to take the plunge. Is there anything more from the Herald's College?

FELIX. No. They 're quite positive that your husband's family has no connection with the Kellaton Whichellos.

MARY. They have n't gone far enough back.

FELIX. They 've gone back to the Civil War.

MARY. They must go back to the Conquest. I think I 'll go up to London and see them myself —

FELIX. Yes, I would.

MARY. Who 's the right man to get hold of?

FELIX. There 's the Earl Marshal, three Kings at Arms, six Heralds, and four Pursuivants —

MARY. What do the Pursuivants do?

FELIX. Oh, I suppose they hang about, and pursue anybody who sports a wrong coat-of-arms.

MARY. I 'll get to know them. I might ask the Garter King at Arms and the Heralds to dinner —

FELIX (*has a shock of surprise; shrugs his shoulders dubiously*). Yes. Well, the Garter King at Arms is your pal. But before you tackle him, what are you going to do about the Bodsworth lawsuit?

MARY. Do? Nothing. Mr. Tadman has n't served the writ yet?

FELIX. Not on me. You 've heard nothing?

MARY. No. I don't believe they 'll go on with it. Ella shall call on Mrs. Bratwick and find out what 's going on at the Bodsworths'.

FELIX. You 're sure you can trust Mrs. Bratwick?

MARY. Oh, yes. I 'm her bosom friend.

FELIX. I thought Lady Bodsworth was Mrs. Bratwick's bosom friend?

MARY. Yes, so she is. I 'm her bosom friend, too. Ella is Mrs. Bratwick's extra special bosom friend. She tells Ella everything. "The impropriety" is raging like the heathen about the paragraphs in the *Mercury*. Have you seen it this morning?

FELIX. Not that column. (*Picks up the Liberal paper.*) "Warkinstall Society and Fashionable Gossip."

MARY. What a dear young fellow that is on the *Mercury* — so sympathetic.

FELIX (*reading*). "We understand that bright golden hair in large puffs will shortly become fashionable again, and will be extensively worn at the forthcoming assizes — "

MARY (*continuing*). "We trust, however, that this attractive coiffure will not be carried to the point of impropriety" — Sh!

[*The curtains are pushed aside, and Dick's voice is heard.*

DICK (*within the curtains*). Very well, then; that 's clearly understood between us.

MARY. Don't show it to Dick. He 's got enough to bear this morning, poor dear!

[*Dick and Betts enter through curtains.*

BETTS (*to Dick*). Of course you 've got to win the seat first. Then I 'll talk to the Chief, and tell him you are anxious to replenish the party war-chest —

DICK. I 'm not so anxious as all that. I 've told you my figure, and — (*nodding very emphatically at Mary*) — I 'm not going to be rushed for a penny more.

MARY (*serenely*). I 'm so glad it 's all arranged. You shall tell me all about it when we get home.

DICK. I don't know that I shall. For once in a way I 'm going to manage my own affairs.

BETTS (*taking out watch*). We must be getting on to Chorley.

DICK (*plaintively*). I have n't got to kow-tow to Ben Chorley, have I?

BETTS. We shall have to skip gently round the minimum wage.

DICK. Well, you skip gently round the minimum wage, and I 'll skip gently round to the Golf Club. I 've promised to meet Monkhouse at the station at eleven, and

have a round on the Dunningtree course before lunch. I shall give Mr. Ben Chorley just ten minutes, no more.

[*Enter Dakin.*

DAKIN (*to Dick*). Mr. Borrodaile is on the telephone, sir. He rang up at your house, and they told him you were here.

DICK (*disgusted*). What the nuisance is Boanerges rampaging about now?

DAKIN. He says he must see you this morning, sir.

DICK. Tell him to— (*Bursts out.*) I'm not going to voice any more burning questions. I've been voicing burning questions for the last fortnight.

FELIX (*looking up from the paper which he has been studying*). I expect it's about last night's meeting. He rang me up an hour ago.

DICK. What did he say?

FELIX. He said you'd have to buckle on your armour, and gird up your loins.

DICK. Gird up my loins? Tell him to gird up his own loins — with that fat stomach of his.

FELIX. You'd better see him. He's got a very sore head.

DICK. Oh, well, you poultice it.

MARY. We'll ask him and Mrs. Borrodaile to dinner.

DICK. No, we will not ask them to dinner. Tea's their meal in my house. And I shan't be at home.

DAKIN (*listening off*). I fancy Mr. Borrodaile's ringing up again.

FELIX. He won't be happy till he has heckled you.

DICK (*taking out watch*). I shall give Boanerges Bloxam Borrodaile, D.D., five minutes; and I shall take it out of Ben Chorley's ten. Five minutes Chorley, five minutes Borrodaile. And then I'm off to golf. Now, Mr. Betts. (*Comes up against the Tory paper, snatches it up angrily.*) And there's this blackguard leading article — I know jolly well I never made such an ass of myself — I —

[*Goes off muttering. Exit Dick.*

BETTS. If he keeps on jibbing at everything like this, we're dead certain to lose the seat.

[*Exit after Dick.*

FELIX (*has been looking gravely at the Mercury*). I say, don't you think you'd better stop this?

MARY. Stop my fashionable gossip? (*Takes out a little slip of paper from her bag.*) Listen to what I've got for to-morrow. (*Reads.*) "Ladies of a certain age who have too freely indulged in cosmetics should not discontinue the practice too suddenly. A magenta complexion, even if it is unseemly, may be less painful than a pasty 'au naturel.'"

FELIX. Yes, that's very good fun — if it only frightens Lady Bodsworth from going into Court. But suppose it does n't? And suppose we get the wrong judge, and suppose it comes out that you've inspired these paragraphs?

MARY. What then?

FELIX. Well, then it won't be very good fun at all.

[*Enter Dakin.*

DAKIN. Mr. Tadman's clerk is here, sir, and he wishes to see Mrs. Whichello.

MARY. See me? What for?

DAKIN. He did n't mention his business, ma'am. They sent him on from your house. If you're busy, he says he'll wait.

FELIX. Send him up, Dakin.

[*Exit Dakin.*

MARY. Why does Mr. Tadman send his clerk to me?

FELIX. Looks like a writ.

MARY. Then they are going on! And Mrs. Bratwick told Ella that Lady Bodsworth wanted to throw up the sponge and go abroad.

[*Dakin shows in Tadman's clerk. Exit Dakin.*

CLERK (*bows to Mary, draws two sheets of paper from his pocket, goes to her, hands her one*). Mrs. Whichello, I have to hand you this document, which is a writ for

slander brought on behalf of Lady Bodsworth. (*Mary looks at Felix and reluctantly takes it.*) Here is the original if you wish to see it.

[*Holding it out.*

FELIX. That 's all right, Pollard.

CLERK. Good-morning, ma'am.

[*Bows to Felix. Exit.*

MARY (*reading, slurring the earlier words*). "High Court of Justice . . . Grace of God, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, British Dominions beyond the Seas . . . Defender of the Faith . . . to Mary Sebright Whichello of the Cedars, St. John's Hill, Warkinstall . . . County of . . . *We command you*, that within eight days after the service of this writ on you, you do cause an appearance to be entered for you —"

[*Looking at Felix.*

FELIX. That is n't the sort of command you want.

MARY. "In an action at the suit of Frances Louisa, wife of Sir Thomas Bodsworth, Knight —" We shall have to go on now —

FELIX. If you do, that knocks your baronetcy on the head.

MARY. You think it does?

FELIX. If you want to get a baronetcy, you must n't be the defendant in a risky slander suit. That 's pretty plain, is n't it?

MARY. But how can I help it?

FELIX. There 's only one way. We shall have to back out and apologise.

MARY. Apologise? Never!

FELIX. Then bang goes the baronetcy.

MARY (*takes a desperate turn, looks again at the writ*). "And take notice that in default of your so doing, the Plaintiff may proceed therein, and judgment may be given in your absence. Witness, Richard Burdon, Viscount Haldane of Cloan, Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain." There must be some way out of it.

FELIX. I don't see any.

MARY. Give up the baronetcy? Go in after that woman all my life? It's impossible.

FELIX. You can have the baronetcy, or you can have the lawsuit; but you can't have both. We must chuck the lawsuit. If we lose it, where are we? We shall all be discredited — Whichello for the seat, you for the title, and I get a bad kick, both as lawyer and election agent. We must draw out.

MARY. What had I better do?

FELIX. I'll run up against Tadman, and find out if they'll agree to a mild apology.

MARY. I won't apologise. (*Felix shrugs his shoulders.*) You have got me into a horrible mess!

FELIX. I've got you into a horrible mess?

MARY. Well, haven't you? You've been advising me all through —

FELIX. I've been trying to advise you —

MARY. Yes, and see where you've landed me.

[*Enter Dakin.*

DAKIN. Mr. Tadman is below, sir. He'd like to speak to you and Mrs. Whichello.

FELIX (*after a glance at Mary*). Show him up. (*Exit Dakin.*) You'd better not say anything. Let me arrange it if I can.

MARY. I'm not going to apologise — at least, not till the last moment.

FELIX. We'll hear what he has to say. Sh!

(*Enter Dakin, showing in Tadman. Exit Dakin.*)

Good-morning, Tadman.

TADMAN (*very cordial*). Good-morning. (*Goes to Mary.*) Good-morning, dear Mrs. Whichello.

MARY. Good-morning.

TADMAN. I must apologise for intruding, Galpin. I've been walking up and down outside your gate for ten minutes —

FELIX. Taking exercise?

TADMAN. No. I was coming down from Sir Thomas when my clerk Pollard came out after doing his duty. (*Tapping the writ in Mary's hand.*) He mentioned you were here. And I said to myself, "Now, shall I do a rather unprofessional thing, and make one last attempt to keep this out of Court?" And I said, "I will, just for the sake of my old friendship with Whichello."

FELIX. That was kind of you. Sit down, won't you?

TADMAN. No, thanks. Can't stay. Got to be back at my office.

FELIX. Sir Thomas doesn't know you're here?

TADMAN. Of course I shall tell him. And I'm sure he'll see I'm not acting against his interest in taking this upon myself. (*A pause.*) You've looked through that? [*Signifying writ.*

MARY. Not all through. I don't understand lawyers' language.

FELIX. It was a long time coming, Tadman. We began to think you'd forgotten all about it.

TADMAN. I held it back, thinking that perhaps Mrs. Whichello might be inclined to — a —

MARY. I'm not going to apologise.

TADMAN. If you've quite made up your mind — I'm sorry. I hoped perhaps — (*Going toward door. Felix makes an appeal to Mary behind his back. Mary responds with a gesture of dissent.*) Good-morning. [*Opens door, going.*

FELIX. Tadman, if I were to advise Mrs. Whichello —

MARY. Oh, I couldn't! Not apologise!

TADMAN (*coming toward her*). If I might suggest — we're all old friends — we don't want to wash our dirty linen in public —

MARY. Oh, it isn't my dirty linen. And I'm not washing it.

TADMAN. No, but you'll have to pay the laundry bill. And you and Whichello will get thoroughly splashed. He wants to go into Parliament, doesn't he?

MARY. Not very much. But I think I shall get him there.

TADMAN (*pointing to writ*). Won't that be rather in your way?

MARY. Oh, no! I've been canvassing. The voters love to talk about yellow hair and magenta cheeks. They like it better than politics.

[*Felix, behind Tadman's back, shakes his head severely at Mary and shows despair.*

TADMAN. Well, I've done my best. It's a pity. (*Going towards door. Felix makes another appeal to Mary.*) Good-morning.

FELIX. What do you propose?

TADMAN. Nothing. But whatever you propose I'll ask Sir Thomas to consider favourably.

FELIX. Hadn't you better get Sir Thomas's authority?

TADMAN (*shakes his head*). In his present temper he won't listen to anything but a definite apology. If I could take him a form we had arranged upon he might give way — I can't tell — I'm willing to try it.

[*Felix looks at Mary. Tadman looks from one to the other.*

MARY (*after a longish pause*). I'll think it over.

TADMAN (*shakes his head*). I'm on my way to engage counsel. When that is done, an apology will be too late.

MARY (*very reluctantly, after a pause*). I don't mind saying I'm sorry.

TADMAN. I daren't approach Sir Thomas with anything but a formal apology, with an expression of regret, and an assurance not to repeat.

FELIX. For publication?

TADMAN. Except in case of necessity I should advise Sir Thomas not to publish.

MARY. No, but the "impropriety" — (*Felix shakes his head at Mary*) — would show it all over the town.

FELIX. What form do you suggest?

TADMAN. I must just consider that. Let me run down to the Club, and draw up the easiest terms I can advise Sir

Thomas to accept. Then, if you and Mrs. Whichello approve, I can go straight to Sir Thomas; we can sign it to-day and the matter's ended.

MARY (*after a pause, very reluctantly*). Very well.

TADMAN. I've done you and Whichello a good turn. I'll be back soon.

MARY (*as Tadman is going off and is closing door, calls after him*). It must be very mild, not like your other apology — just a tiny wee one.

(*Exit Tadman.*)

There! You see what you've let me in for.

FELIX. I've let you in?

MARY. You should have bluffed Mr. Tadman.

FELIX. Yes, and bluffed you out of all chance of the baronetcy. Now we've got to put some stiffening into Whichello. He's going the right way to lose this election. We must coax him to swallow the minimum wage from Chorley. And above all we've got to keep him good pals with Borrodaile.

[*Dick enters in a towering rage. They look at him.*

MARY. Dick! What's the matter?

DICK. I've had twenty mortal minutes with Bloxam Borrodaile.

MARY (*alarmed*). You haven't quarrelled with him?

DICK. Not outwardly and visibly. But inwardly I have consigned him to bottomless perdition. And if he crosses my path within the next three months —

[*Moves his fist slowly up and down, threatening the absent Borrodaile. Mary and Felix look at each other in despair. Felix shrugs his shoulders and goes away.*

MARY. What did he do?

DICK. He boanerged all over his drawing-room, like a bull of Bashan; lathered me for my speech last night, and wants me to take the chair next week for some black chap who's going to voice the wrongs of India.

MARY. You said you would?

DICK. No, I did not. I sloped off to the station and left

him boanerging on his doorstep. When I got to the station, the Dunningtree train had gone. So he has done me out of my round with Monkhouse. (*Turns solemnly to Mary.*) Now, don't you ask Bloxam Borrodaile to my house. His tea 's off.

MARY. But we must keep in with Borrodaile —

[*Appeals to Felix, who shrugs his shoulders and grins.*

DICK. You keep in with him if you like, but speaking for myself, two penn'orth more of Borrodaile, and I throw up the whole job.

MARY (*in despair*). Throw up? You can't throw up your Liberal principles now!

[*Again appeals to Felix, who shrugs his shoulders and grins.*

DICK. Can't I? Two penn'orth more of Borrodaile — one penn'orth — a ha'porth —

[*Enter Dakin.*

DAKIN (*to Dick*). Mr. Borrodaile wants to speak to you again on the 'phone, sir.

[*Felix bursts into laughter. Dick rises, furious; thinks better of it, and calmly sits down.*

DICK. Tell him I 'll make an appointment with him in the sweet by-and-bye.

MARY. No — no — you must go and see what he wants, must n't he?

[*Appeals to Felix, who merely shrugs his shoulders and grins.*

DAKIN. He says it 's most important, sir; something he forgot to question you about —

DICK. Tell him to heckle the telephone. I 've had enough of it.

MARY (*to Dakin*). Tell him Mr. Whichello will be down to speak to him in a moment.

(*Exit Dakin.*)

(*Trying to get Dick out of his chair.*) Now, Dick, we can't win the election without Borrodaile.

DICK. Then we 'll lose it.

MARY. But if we lose the election, we shan't get the baronetcy. We can't lose it! (*Tries again to get Dick out of the chair; appeals with a gesture to Felix.*) Mr. Galpin, won't you — Please!

FELIX. I'll go and see what Borrodaile wants.

MARY. Tell him Dick agrees with every word he says. (*Felix goes off. She calls after him.*) And tell him I'll take the chair for his black man. Now, Dick, this is disgraceful! You knew what it meant when you took up Liberal principles —

DICK. By Jove, I did n't! or I 'd never have gone in for it.

MARY. But you have gone in for it. You said you 'd never draw back. You said you would n't let Bodsworth walk over you.

DICK. Well, he is n't going to walk over me.

MARY. But he is walking over you. You must go on now! You must fight it to the end!

DICK. Very well then, if you want me to see this through, you keep Borrodaile out of my way, because if he dares to boanerge over me, I shall gird up my loins and I shall — Good heavens!

MARY. What is the matter?

DICK. Good Lord!

MARY. What is it?

DICK. I've lost my golf clubs. (*Mary looks at him in despair.*) Now that's all through jawing with Borrodaile about his black man! Now where did I — I must have left them at the station.

[*Re-enter Felix.*

MARY. What does Mr. Borrodaile want?

FELIX. It seems two members of his congregation saw Whichello playing golf on Sunday. He says no man is fit to represent Warkinstall on Liberal principles who plays golf on Sundays. And unless — (*to Dick*) — you give a distinct pledge to abstain from Sunday golf, he must request you to resign your candidature.

DICK. That's all right. I resign my candidature.

MARY. No! (*Glancing nervously at Dick.*) Tell him Mr. Whichello will abstain —

DICK (*jumps up*). Eh?

MARY. Tell him it will be all right. (*Glancing nervously at Dick.*) Ask him to bring Mrs. Borrodaile to have din— (*Dick looks furious*) — tea with me —

DICK. Not in my house.

MARY. Say it will be all right, and ask him and Mrs. Borrodaile to dinner with you to-night.

FELIX. Dinner with me?

MARY. Yes — I 'll come, too. Oh, do go and pacify him! do! (*Getting him off at door, looks at Dick, who is placidly lighting a cigarette; can't quite make up her mind how to tackle him.*) Dick, you deserve to be shaken! (*Rushes furiously at him and shakes him.*) You can't really mean to draw back now?

DICK. Yes, I do. I wash my hands of the whole crew.

MARY. No. Not till you 've won the seat. (*Wheedling.*) You will keep in with Borrodaile till after the election? Yes — there 's a dear, good boy! And I 'll be such a darling to you for a long while. I 've always said you were the best husband in the world —

DICK (*has picked up the cigarette she has knocked out of his hand*). Well, so I am.

MARY. Yes, if you 'll only just let me, eh? — (*stroking his chin and kissing him*) — eh? — phone to old Boanerges that you 'll give up the golf — eh? old sonnie, eh?

DICK. Give up my golf? After sticking in the House all the week, listening to their jaw half the night, and voting just how I 'm told for a lot of hangnation things I don't know and don't care a cuss about! No. We 're in this world for a very short time. Do let us be happy, do let us be comfortable while we are here.

MARY. You 'll be more chaffed than ever! You will have a bad time. (*Goes to him again, throws her arms round his neck.*) Dick, old man, give it to me for a birthday present next month, eh?

DICK. Give you what?

MARY. Let me see Borrodaile and Ben Chorley and promise them everything they want. I'll do it all — and get you safely into the House; and then as soon as the Government have rewarded you, you can retire from politics, and go round the world. And when you come back, you can change your views and be a nice old Tory again, and join your club — eh?

DICK (*calm, good-humoured, very firm*). No. No. No. No. No.

MARY. You mean that? You aren't going to fight the seat after all?

DICK (*same tone*). No. No. No. No. No. No.

[*Mary bursts suddenly into tears.*

MARY (*sobbing*). And after all I've done for you. And the Duchess of Gloucester is coming to open the maternity wing of the Sanatorium. And Lady Bodsworth is going to present her with a bouquet. (*Peeping at him through her tears.*) I shall go and stay with Aunt Henrietta! You won't like that! Remember how you begged me to come home last time. I'll stay away for a month! I will! (*Peeping at him. He remains unmoved, placidly smoking. She rushes at him.*) Dick, you're a brute!

DICK. Now, look here, old girl. I'm not going into Parliament. That's settled. But next month, when your birthday comes, we'll go to the South —

MARY. No, we won't.

DICK. Well, where shall we go? Don't you remember the jolly times we had at —

MARY. No!

DICK. Well, we have had some jolly times together. (*Mary dissents.*) Oh, yes, we have. (*Trying to fondle her.*) And I'll give you that new Rolls Royce, and I'll take you for the jolliest trip — now where shall we go?

MARY. I'm going to Aunt Henrietta the first thing to-

morrow morning. (*Felix enters.*) What did you tell Mr. Borrodaile?

FELIX. They 'd cut us off, and his line 's engaged. What 's the matter?

MARY. He has thrown it up! The maundering renegade! The turncoat! The incoherent and incapable wobbler! The blustering and blundering ratter! Look at him!

[*Dick sits quietly smoking.*

FELIX. You aren't to stand for Warkinstall?

DICK (*same tone*). No. No. No. No. No. No.

FELIX. What 's to be done?

MARY. They ought to make him a baronet for the cemetery.

FELIX. Not much chance of that.

MARY. Then he must give the town something else — a new Town Hall!

FELIX. We don't want a new Town Hall.

MARY. Well, what does the town want? A people's park with zoölogical gardens and tortoises and kangaroos and a monkey house —

DICK. With land all round at two thousand pounds an acre. No, thank you!

MARY. Well — a picture gallery — a museum — an aquarium? The town must want something.

[*Enter Betts.*

BETTS. It 's all right. I 've nobbled Chorley. (*To Dick.*) But you 'll have to swallow the minimum wage and the Osborne judgment.

DICK. I 'm not going to swallow anything!

MARY (*calling Betts to her*). Mr. Betts, my husband thinks that perhaps the Liberal cause might not be quite safe in his hands, so he has decided to become a philanthropist to the town.

BETTS (*looks all round, puzzled*). Oh! Has he?

MARY (*drawing Betts aside*). Rather than the Liberal cause should suffer through him, he 'll sacrifice himself —

[*Goes on talking to Betts.*

DICK. I say, Galpin, I've lost my golf clubs—

FELIX. Have you?

DICK. I can't remember where I left them. I know I had them in the cab when I left Borrodaile's. I believe I took them into the booking office. Would you let your man ring them up at the station, and ask them to look round?

FELIX. Certainly.

DICK. I haven't had a round for a fortnight, ever since this ghastly speeching and voicing has been going on.

BETTS (*to Mary*). Oh, no, I couldn't suggest it. We can't go chucking about titles for museums and picture galleries. We're out to win the seat from the Tories. Seats are what we want just now!

MARY. Then what's to be done? (*Sees Felix; is struck with an idea.*) Mr. Galpin, you must stand for Warkinstall!

FELIX. Stand for Warkinstall!

BETTS (*enthusiastically*). Good business! Good business!

MARY. What do you say?

FELIX. Oh, I'm on the job—emphatically on the job. But I've got no money.

MARY. Dick and I will see to that.

DICK. What?

MARY. Of course you will, Dick. You can't leave the Liberal Party in the lurch now. You're bound to see them through this election. (*Turns to Betts.*) If Mr. Whichello lends his influence to Mr. Galpin, and pays the election expenses, I suppose the Chief would recognise his self-sacrifice?

BETTS. I feel sure he would. I should explain Whichello's self-denying action, and if he'll—(*looking at Dick*)—send a tidy cheque to the war-chest, I'll put it in the right light to the Chief.

MARY. Then that's settled.

DICK. I don't know so much about that.

MARY. Hold your tongue, Dick. (*In a very low pleading*

voice to Betts.) I suppose if my husband sent in quite a large cheque — something very handsome indeed — the Government would n't consider him for — a —

BETTS. For what?

MARY (*in a very timid, nervous whisper*). For a — peerage?

BETTS. Peerage?

[*By a gesture expresses horror too great to be conveyed in words.*

MARY. I said of course they would n't. Of course not. We shall be quite satisfied with a baronetcy.

DICK. Mr. Betts, you know my figure. (*To Mary.*) Not a penny more. Now can I get on to the station about my golf clubs?

MARY (*in a low tone to Betts*). It 's all right. He will jump. (*To Felix.*) Will Mr. Borrodaile accept you as candidate?

FELIX. Oh, yes. After my speech last night he wrung my hand and said: "Ah, Mr. Galpin, you 're the sort of man we want to blow the Liberal trumpet in Warkinstall and Westminster!"

BETTS. I say, old man, you 'll have to play a tune or two on the Socialist trumpet —

FELIX. Shall I?

BETTS. I 've promised Chorley —

FELIX. That 's awkward. I 've been telling everybody that the Liberal Party is the only bulwark against Socialism.

MARY. Well, is n't it?

FELIX. I dunnow. That 's what I 've been saying.

MARY. Never mind what you 've been saying. You 've got to win the seat.

FELIX (*after a perplexed gesture*). Well, after all, it 's only looking at things from a Socialist point of view —

DICK (*who has been quietly smoking and ruminating, has just taken up the writ and glanced at it*). Hillo, Galpin, what 's this?

FELIX. What?

DICK. You've told me all through I shouldn't have a lawsuit with Bodsworth.

FELIX. I hope I shall be able to arrange—

DICK. You'd better, because if this comes into Court, I button up my pockets for the election expenses.

[*Felix looks appealingly at Mary.*

[*Dakin shows in Ella, and exit.*

ELLA (*dancing in*). She's funked it! She's funked it! She's funked it!

MARY. Who has? Funked what?

ELLA. The "impropriety." She daren't go into Court! She simply daren't!

MARY. How do you know?

ELLA. Mrs. Bratwick has just called with the joyful news, so I came on with it at once.

MARY. Yes—tell me—

ELLA. It seems they had a grand council of war last night—

MARY. Who?

ELLA. Sir Thomas, the "impropriety," and Mr. Tadman. Sir Thomas wanted to go on, but she daren't face it, so they decided to withdraw from the lawsuit.

MARY. But they've sent me a writ.

ELLA. Yes. The "impropriety" wants an apology. So Tadman suggested he should serve the writ, and then call upon you, as an old friend, and get an apology out of you if he could.

MARY. The old fox! We might have known he was bluffing.

ELLA. So he's coming to see you this morning to try it on.

MARY. Is he? Is he?

ELLA. Don't you let him get round you.

MARY. Oh, I won't.

ELLA. The "impropriety" has decided to have an attack of rheumatism and be ordered to Aix. That's to be their reason for not going on with the lawsuit.

[*Enter Dakin, showing in Tadman. Exit Dakin.*

TADMAN. Morning, Whichello.

DICK. Good-morning.

TADMAN. Good-morning, Miss Southwood.

ELLA. Good-morning.

TADMAN (*drawing out a sheet of paper*). I'm delighted we're going to settle this painful little affair.

MARY. So are we.

TADMAN (*giving Felix the paper*). I've made it quite easy for Mrs. Whichello. I think that will meet the case.

FELIX (*glancing at paper*). I don't think so, Tadman, I don't think so.

TADMAN (*surprised*). Eh?

MARY. How is Lady Bodsworth this morning?

TADMAN. Very well, I believe.

MARY. No symptoms of her old enemy, rheumatism?

TADMAN. No. Won't you look at the apology?

MARY. It won't be necessary, will it, Mr. Galpin?

FELIX. Not at all. You may tell Sir Thomas we accept service of the writ.

TADMAN (*nonplussed*). Oh! That is your final decision?

FELIX. Absolutely.

TADMAN. I may warn you—

FELIX. No, don't, Tadman. (*Putting his hand on Tadman's shoulder.*) You go to Sir Thomas and Lady Bodsworth, as an old friend, and say we shall fight this out in Court.

MARY. Wigs on the green!

TADMAN. Oh! (*Looks round.*) I'll tell Sir Thomas. Good-morning.

[*Exit Tadman.*

MARY (*to Felix*). Now, you must get out your election address.

FELIX. Right.

MARY. Can I help you?

FELIX. Rather. We must pitch it strong.

[*Enter Dakin with a set of golf sticks.*

DAKIN (*to Dick*). The cabman who took you to the station found these in the cab, sir.

DICK (*taking his golf clubs lovingly*). Give him half-a-crown.

[*Exit Dakin.*

MARY. Dick, you must get out a farewell address to the electors, recommending Mr. Galpin.

DICK. Eh?

FELIX. Don't worry about that. I'll write it for you.

[*Mary, Ella, and Felix have had a hurried talk. Felix sits down to write, Mary over him.*

DICK (*strapping his clubs on his shoulder*). Now look here, Galpin. I'm not going to be landed in goodness knows what expenses over this confounded election of yours —

MARY (*waving him away*). Run away, you dear thing! Run away, and play golf till after the election.

FELIX. Fellow citizens of Warkinstall —

[*Dick is going off with his clubs on his shoulder.*

CURTAIN

(*Nearly two years and a half pass between Act III and the Epilogue.*)

EPILOGUE

SCENE. *The same. The room has been brightened by the addition of feminine belongings, and gives evidence that there is a mistress in the house. Time, just before dinner on a summer evening. The room is dimly lighted. The blind is up and the last rays of the setting sun come through the window.*

Discover Felix and Chesher in evening dress, as if waiting for guests. Dakin is making the room tidy, and turns up additional electric lights.

FELIX. So Ella and I thought we'd give a little dinner, and get them to shake hands and bury the hatchet.

CHESHER. Then you're friendly with the Bodsworths?

FELIX. My dear uncle, I'm member for Warkinstall, and I intend to remain member for Warkinstall, so Ella and I are friendly with everybody.

DAKIN (*going off*). I beg pardon, sir — shall I throw it up a bit?

FELIX. Throw what up?

DAKIN (*in a rather loud tone*). Sir Richard and Lady Whichello.

FELIX. No, Dakin, no. Keep that tone for knighthoods. The higher the title, the less it needs throwing up.

DAKIN. Yes, sir.

[*Exit Dakin.*

FELIX. Yes, Ella and I had been trying to bring them together for months.

CHESHER. Should have thought two years rowing would have satisfied any reasonable people.

FELIX. It was Lady Bodsworth who held off. Bodsworth is ready to make it up, because he and Tadman are working Tariff Reform, and they want Dick to join

them in getting a stiff duty on leather goods out of the Tory leaders.

CHESHER. What are Whichello's politics just now?

FELIX. Rather northwest southeast. Well, six weeks ago, Lady Bodsworth fortunately had a motor accident about twenty miles out. Dick and Mary fortunately came by and picked her up and carried her to the nearest inn. Dick and Mary had just got a note from the Prime Minister to say they were to be included in the birthday honours. So Mary was very kind; stayed with Lady Bodsworth all night, and nursed her up rather more than she wanted to be nursed. Now Mary has got the baronetcy, she feels rather friendly toward Lady Bodsworth.

CHESHER. There's nobody we like quite so much as the enemy we have thoroughly downed.

FELIX. Well, that paved the way for a reconciliation. But Ella had no end of a job to persuade Lady Bodsworth to come to-night. However, she is coming; and we are going to have a jolly little family dinner-party. That's why I invited you down. You'll be in at the death.

CHESHER. Doctor's chief function.

[*Enter Dakin, announcing Mr. and Mrs. Tadman. Enter Tadman and Mrs. Tadman. Exit Dakin.*

FELIX (*to Mrs. Tadman*). How d'ye do?

[*Shaking hands.*

MRS. TADMAN. How d'ye do?

FELIX. My wife will be down directly. We were late in getting back from the Petbury garden party.

(*Chesher and Tadman have shaken hands. Mrs. Tadman shakes hands with Chesher.*)

Tadman, how are you?

TADMAN (*rosier, more shaky*). Never felt so well in my life.

FELIX. There's a bottle of your own port for you.

TADMAN. Then I shall feel better still.

FELIX. And you'll find a cocktail on that table.

[*Pointing to window.*

TADMAN. Thanks.

[*Helps himself to cocktail.*

MRS. TADMAN. I'm so sorry the Bodsworths aren't coming.

FELIX (*taken aback*). Not coming?

MRS. TADMAN. You have n't heard?

FELIX. No, we 're expecting them.

MRS. TADMAN. Perhaps I ought n't to have spoken.

FELIX. Yes — please tell me.

MRS. TADMAN. I was calling on Lady Bodsworth this afternoon. She was very much upset.

FELIX. What about?

MRS. TADMAN. Sir Thomas and she were not invited to the garden party at Petbury Park this afternoon.

FELIX. I can't help that. There were only the county people there.

MRS. TADMAN. She feels it was a great slight, and she could n't possibly dine with you under the circumstances.

FELIX. But good heavens! I can't tell Lady Petbury whom to invite —

MRS. TADMAN. So I told her, but she would n't be persuaded. I left her writing a note to Mrs. Galpin, asking you to excuse them.

FELIX. Well, of all — it 's really too bad —

TADMAN (*over his cocktail*). Never mind, Galpin! If the dinner is up to your usual standard, we shall get on very well without the Bodsworths.

FELIX. But we 're giving this dinner on purpose to bring them and the Whichellos together again.

CHESHER. Felix, my boy, you don't seem quite to hit it off with your dinner-parties.

FELIX. And Lady Bodsworth fixed the day herself — they might have sent us word to say they were n't coming — it 's too bad.

TADMAN (*has been looking out of the window*). Is n't that the Bodsworth motor just driven up? Yes —

[*Mrs. Tadman and Chesher move toward window.*

MRS. TADMAN. Sir Thomas is getting out.

FELIX. Is he alone?

TADMAN. No — there 's Lady Bodsworth — he 's helping her out.

MRS. TADMAN. So they 're coming after all.

TADMAN. There 's something the matter.

MRS. TADMAN. Lady Bodsworth is crying.

FELIX. I suppose we shall have a scene again.

MRS. TADMAN. She is getting back into the motor.

TADMAN. No, Sir Thomas won't let her. He 's arguing with her.

MRS. TADMAN. Oh, yes, she is coming in. Let 's hope it will all pass off pleasantly.

[*Mrs. Tadman, Chesher, and Felix come away from the window.*

FELIX. Uncle, I think Ella has arranged for you to take her in.

CHESHER. I scarcely feel equal to it.

TADMAN (*has helped himself to another cocktail*). Oh, give her a glass or two of Galpin's champagne to start with.

FELIX. And keep off the Whichello baronetcy. And the Petbury garden party.

MRS. TADMAN. Yes, and she 's very touchy about — but perhaps I ought n't to mention it —

FELIX. Oh, yes! Let 's make her happy if we can. What 's she touchy about?

MRS. TADMAN. Well, as you know, the last two years since your dinner-party everybody has been making remarks about the way she does her hair, and it makes her very sensitive. She had got a new transformation for to-night, but Sir Thomas would n't let her wear it. He insists that for the future she shall wear her own hair.

FELIX. Good Lord! What will she look like now?

MRS. TADMAN. Well, I told her it suited her beautifully.

FELIX. Oh! let's all tell her it suits her beautifully.

MRS. TADMAN. No! She's so fidgety, we'd better pretend to take no notice.

FELIX. Oh, let us all pretend anything — if it will only keep her quiet.

(*Enter Dakin, announcing Sir Thomas Bodsworth. Enter Sir Thomas. Dakin waits. Felix advances to shake hands with Sir Thomas.*)

How d'ye do, Sir Thomas? We hope Lady Bodsworth —

SIR THOMAS (*shaking hands*). Lady Bodsworth is overtaken with the heat. She is in the morning-room. She asked me to come up and leave her to recover herself. Please don't take any notice.

FELIX. We are so sorry —

SIR THOMAS. It's nothing. She'll be here in a minute.

[*Goes to Tadman, Mrs. Tadman, and Chesher, and shakes hands with them.*

FELIX. Dakin, will you send up to Mrs. Galpin and say our guests are arriving.

DAKIN. I beg pardon, sir, Mrs. Galpin was coming downstairs, when she heard Lady Bodsworth upsetting herself. She is now in the morning-room pacifying Lady Bodsworth.

FELIX. Oh, all right.

[*Much perplexed, looking anxiously at his watch. Exit Dakin.*

TADMAN (*has been talking with Sir Thomas*). We'll ask Galpin. (*Comes up, cocktail in hand.*) Galpin, now we're all tiled in, and all friends, how much did Whichello stump up for his baronetcy?

FELIX (*warningly*). Sh-sh-sh-sh. Nobody can say that he didn't richly deserve it.

SIR THOMAS. Oh, certainly. We are all delighted at the honour, particularly Lady Bodsworth and myself. Nobody who knows the burden of a title, the amount of public duty it entails — and the subscriptions to chari-

ties — would envy those whom it pleases His Majesty to select for the honour.

CHESHER. My old fellow-student, Sir Robert Latimore, got a baronetcy last year to please his wife. Bob declares that if he had n't been obliged to work so hard for the title, he might have known something about medicine.

TADMAN. Now, between ourselves, Galpin, how much did Whichello —

FELIX (*warningly*). Sh-sh-sh! Sh-sh-sh!

TADMAN. We shall get him again, Galpin — we shall get get him again!

FELIX. Who?

TADMAN. He 's wobbling! He 's wobbling! Bet you a new hat we shall have him safe in the Tory fold before he 's a year older.

[*Lady Bodsworth enters, accompanied by Ella. Lady Bodsworth is wearing her own hair, which is grey-white and rather scanty. She is recovering from a fit of crying, and has a little smudged her complexion. Ella is comforting and supporting her.*

ELLA. There! There! You 're better now.

[*Taking her to sofa, and seating her.*

LADY BODSWORTH. I do hope everybody will excuse me —

[*Weeping a little.*

ELLA. Oh, yes. Sit there a minute. We 'll leave you to come round.

(*Exchanges a look of comic distress with Felix, who goes to Lady Bodsworth and shakes hands with her. Ella goes to Sir Thomas and the Tadmans, and shakes hands. Lady Bodsworth remains on sofa weeping.*)

How are you, Sir Thomas? (*Shaking hands.*) Dear Mrs. Tadman. (*Shaking hands.*) Mr. Tadman, how are you? (*Shaking hands.*) Uncle, so glad you could run down. (*Shaking hands with Chesher.*) You must please forgive me being late. We could not get away from the Petbury garden party —

(*A little choking sob from Lady Bodsworth, who sits on sofa. Tadman, Mrs. Tadman, and Chesher admonish Ella to silence by a look. Sir Thomas is vexed at Lady Bodsworth's behaviour, and frowns at her to be quiet. Ella can't understand the meaning of the look the Tadmans and Chesher have given her — goes on.*) It was such a jolly party —

[*Lady Bodsworth has another rather louder choke. The Tadmans again admonish Ella to silence by a look. Ella does not understand. The Tadmans and Chesher draw her a little aside and explain in dumb show. Felix has tried to comfort Lady Bodsworth.*

LADY BODSWORTH (*between her sobs, to Felix*). You're very kind, but I really think I'd better go home.

SIR THOMAS (*sternly*). Nonsense! Nonsense! We have come expressly to congratulate Sir Richard and Lady Whichello upon the honour which it has pleased His Majesty to confer upon them.

[*Goes to her and argues. Felix is seen to be comforting her.*

ELLA (*to Tadmans and Chesher*). I see. I won't mention the garden party. And there's another thing. Sir Thomas has made her wear her own hair, and she's fretting because she thinks it isn't becoming.

TADMAN. It's a good deal more becoming than —

MRS. TADMAN. Sh — don't look at her — she'll guess we're talking about it.

TADMAN. Mum! Mum!

[*He goes to table, puts down his second cocktail empty, hesitates whether he shall take a third. Sir Thomas has frightened Lady Bodsworth into submission. Felix looks impatiently at his watch and comes to Ella.*

ELLA (*to Felix*). The dinner will be spoilt.

LADY BODSWORTH (*plaintively, from sofa*). I suppose there were a great many people at the garden party?

FELIX. No. Just a few staunch Liberals like myself.

ELLA. Mary and Dick ought to be here —

[*Enter Dakin, announcing Sir Richard and Lady Whichello. Enter Mary and Dick. Exit Dakin.*

MARY. My dear Ella, we're terribly late. Ah, my dear Sir Thomas! Now this is really good of you.

[*Shaking hands.*

SIR THOMAS. We are delighted to congratulate you and Sir Richard —

MARY. I'm sure you are —

[*Stops at seeing Lady Bodsworth, who, upon her entrance, has had a renewed little fit of tears.*

SIR THOMAS (*in reply to an inquiring look from Mary*). It's nothing — a little overtaken by the heat — please take no notice.

MARY. You really must excuse us, Ella — the Petburys would keep us till the last moment — (*Lady Bodsworth has a louder choking sob — Tadman, Ella, Chesher, and Mrs. Tadman admonish Mary by a look to keep quiet.*) And as they were giving the party in our honour — (*Another look from the group, which Mary does not understand*) — we felt bound to stay till the last moment. (*Another look from the group. To Ella.*) What's the matter?

[*Ella whispers to Mary.*

SIR THOMAS (*sternly to Lady Bodsworth*). Now, Fanny, my dear, rouse yourself — and offer our sincere congratulations to Sir Richard and Lady Whichello upon the honour which it has pleased His Majesty —

[*Lady Bodsworth rises, still tearful, tries to speak, bursts into tears.*

MARY. Oh, never mind about the congratulations. Dick and I are tired of them. (*To Lady Bodsworth.*) Now this is very dear of you and Sir Thomas. We're so glad to meet you again as old friends.

[*Shaking hands.*

LADY BODSWORTH (*still tearful, nerving herself to speak*). I'm sure we're delighted — delighted —

[*Has a renewed little fit of tears.*

MARY. Of course you are. And we shall see a great deal of you, I hope. Lady Petbury sent you such a sweet message.

LADY BODSWORTH. Did she?

MARY. Yes, she said: "How is our dear Lady Bodsworth? I must call and see her the first time I'm in Warkinstall."

LADY BODSWORTH. I think she might have invited — (*Sinking on the sofa in renewed sobs.*) I do feel I've been slighted.

MARY. No, no, no —

[*Lady Bodsworth continues sobbing. Mary turns round with a gesture of helplessness to the company.*

LADY BODSWORTH. I'm sorry to upset your party —

ELLA. Oh, don't mention it. (*To Felix.*) The dinner's spoiling.

SIR THOMAS (*sternly*). Fanny, this is unworthy the dignity of our position. Even if we are not invited to Petbury, we have still our rank in Warkinstall to maintain. Remember that, and don't let me have to blush for you.

[*Mary goes to Lady Bodsworth, and is seen to be fussing over and comforting her.*

TADMAN. Oh, before I forget, Whichello, just put that in your pocket and look at it when you get home.

[*Giving paper.*

DICK. What is it?

TADMAN. My revised scheme of Tariff Reform. I've eased a bit on bacon, and tightened on rubber and mackintosh.

DICK. So long as the leather trade gets a look-in —

TADMAN. Oh, it does. That's a water-tight scheme. I've sent it to the Party leaders.

DICK. Good!

TADMAN. And we hope you'll attend the meeting and say a few words —

DICK. No, thank you. I've chucked politics. Let everybody have everything he hollers for. Then we shall all be happy.

[*Mary has taken Lady Bodsworth apart, and is comforting her.*

LADY BODSWORTH. You're quite sure it suits me?

MARY. Perfectly, perfectly. I've never seen you look so charming. Don't change it in the least.

[*Ella has whispered to Sir Thomas and Tadman about their partners.*

[*Enter Dakin.*

DAKIN. Dinner is served, ma'am.

[*Exit Dakin.*

MARY (*to Lady Bodsworth*). There! You feel better now?

LADY BODSWORTH (*a little tearful still*). Yes, but—

(*Gulps. Ella comes up to Lady Bodsworth and whispers to her.*)

(*Discontentedly.*) Oh, Mr. Tadman takes me in—

FELIX (*to Ella*). I thought my uncle—

CHESHER. Oh, I give way and come in on my own. Mr. Tadman—

[*Tadman, after much hesitation, is just putting his third cocktail to his lips, hurriedly puts glass on table, and goes to Lady Bodsworth, offers his arm.*

TADMAN. Delighted.

[*Lady Bodsworth shows hesitation.*

ELLA. You'd prefer Dr. Chesher?

LADY BODSWORTH. No—I feel rather faint again.

(*General consternation.*)

(*Weeping copiously.*) And I have been so slighted. But sooner than make things unpleasant, I feel I'd better go home.

MARY (*dropping Felix's arm, which she had taken*). You take her in. (*Felix demurs.*) Yes, do. It will please her. Lady Bodsworth, Mr. Galpin will take you in.

LADY BODSWORTH. Oh, no. It wouldn't be proper.

MARY. Oh, there's nothing improper— (*Stops, remembering the word.*) I insist. Give her your arm, Felix.

[*Felix offers his arm to Lady Bodsworth.*

LADY BODSWORTH. Oh, no, it would be a breach of etiquette.

MARY. Etiquette? This is just a little family dinner-party. (*To Felix.*) Take her in.

FELIX. Now, Lady Bodsworth —

LADY BODSWORTH. No, please. I could n't dream of going in before Lady Whichello — especially now she has been created —

[*The thought causes a renewed fit of tears. Felix turns to Ella.*

ELLA. Oh, take her, take her!

[*Tadman manages to get to the table and takes a sly sip of his third cocktail. Felix goes again to Lady Bodsworth and offers arm.*

LADY BODSWORTH. Oh, no — it 's very kind — but I could n't — no, really.

FELIX. Dear Lady Bodsworth, whom would you like to take you in?

LADY BODSWORTH. I 'm sure I don't mind — don't think of me.

MARY. What does it matter? We shan't get any dinner. I 'll take you in! (*Taking Lady Bodsworth's arm.*) Come along — Fanny!

[*Taking her to door. The door is too narrow for them to go out together. They stand there, each of them making way for the other, and motioning each other to go first. Mary resolutely takes Lady Bodsworth's arm and drags her off.*

CURTAIN

NOTE

The author is threatened with an action for libel if he publishes this comedy without revising it in a form that will be acceptable to Mr. George Whichelow of Bermondsey. The author wishes to state that until the production of the play he was unaware of the existence of Mr. George Whichelow. He regrets if he has inadvertently given any annoyance to that gentleman, but is quite unable to understand the reason for that annoyance. It is obvious that if Mr. George Whichelow's claim to revise this play is not resisted, every author of a novel or a play will in future be liable to a costly legal action from any person who happens to have a similar name or trade to any one of the characters in his work.

It may be interesting to the American reader to know that the action for libel was never brought against Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, as it was found that the plaintiff had no case.

THE GOAL

A DRAMATIC FRAGMENT

Characters

Sir Stephen Famariss, the great Engineer
Daniel Famariss, his son, Engineer
Sir Lydden Crane, M.D.
Adams, Sir Stephen's Butler
Peggie Lovel
Nurse Clandon

THE GOAL

SCENE. *The dressing-room of Sir Stephen Famariss, Belgrave Square. A very richly furnished apartment, with every evidence of wealth and luxury. Up stage, right, an archway, set diagonally, shows a bedroom beyond with foot of brass bedstead placed sideways to audience. The bedroom is dimly lighted. A large bow-window, rather deeply recessed, runs along the left at back, and looks across a courtyard to another house, whose windows are brilliantly lighted. Figures dancing are seen moving across the windows in accordance with indications given through the play. Between archway and window a large handsome bureau. A door left, down stage. Down stage, right, fireplace with fire burning. A mirror over fireplace. A large comfortable sofa, down stage, right. A table left of sofa near centre of stage, with bottle of champagne and glasses on it. Another table up stage, left, above door. Upon it medicine bottles, spirit lamp, and other paraphernalia of a sick-room. A large pier looking-glass up stage above sofa. Other furniture as required, all indicating great wealth and comfort. Time, about ten on an April evening in 1897.*

Discover on sofa, asleep, Sir Stephen Famariss. A rug is thrown over him, and his head is buried in a pillow, so that nothing is seen of him but a figure under the rug. Nurse Clandon, in nurse's costume, about thirty, is seated in chair at table, reading. The door, left, is very softly opened, and Sir Lydden Crane enters, a little, dry, shrewd, wizened old man about seventy, with manners of a London physician. Nurse rises and puts down her book.

CRANE. Well? How has he been all the afternoon?

NURSE. Just as usual. He won't keep quiet. About an hour ago he fell asleep.

[*Points to Sir Stephen.*

CRANE. Mr. Daniel Famariss has not arrived?

NURSE. No. He sent another telegram for him this evening. And he keeps on asking for the evening papers.

CRANE. Well?

NURSE. I've kept them from him. They all have long accounts of his illness. (*Taking an evening paper from under the table cover, giving it to Crane.*) Look!

CRANE (*taking paper, reading*). "Sir Stephen Famariss, the great engineer, is dying—" Hum!

[*A very gentle knock is heard at door left. Nurse goes to it, opens it. Adams comes in a step.*

ADAMS. I beg pardon. Mrs. Lovel has sent in to ask how Sir Stephen is; and to say that she's very sorry the ballroom is so near his bedroom; and if the noise of the ball will upset Sir Stephen, she 'll be very pleased to put it off, and send her guests away.

NURSE. What do you think, Sir Lydden?

CRANE. All excitement is very dangerous for Sir Stephen. The next attack may be fatal. Will you give my compliments to Mrs. Lovel, and say that, since she is so kind, I will beg her to postpone the ball?

[*Sir Stephen stirs, throws off the quilt. He is in a rich dressing-gown. A wiry, handsome, very intellectual-looking man about seventy-five; well-seasoned, vigorous frame; pale, sharp, strong features, showing signs of great recent pain.*

SIR STEPHEN. Will you give my compliments to Mrs. Lovel, and say that, since she is so kind, I will beg her to do nothing of the kind. What rubbish, Crane! Because I happen to be dying, to stop the innocent pleasure of a couple of hundred young people! Thank Mrs. Lovel very much, Adams, for sending in, and say that I 'm not at all sure that I shall die to-night; but that if I do, her dancing won't in the least interfere with my dying, and I hope she won't allow my dying to interfere with her dancing. I very much wish the ball to take

place. (*Very imperiously.*) It's not to be put off! You understand?

ADAMS. Yes, Sir Stephen.

[*Going.*

SIR STEPHEN. And, Adams, give my compliments to Mrs. Lovel, and say that, if she does n't mind, I should like to see Miss Lovel in her ball dress for a moment before the ball. Say that I'm quite presentable, and I won't frighten Miss Lovel.

(*Exit Adams.*)

Well, Crane, am I going off this time?

CRANE. This last attack coming so quickly after the other is very alarming and — very dangerous.

SIR STEPHEN. Yes, but am I going to pull through again, or must I put up the shutters?

CRANE. Well — well —

SIR STEPHEN (*seeing paper on table where Crane has put it*). Is that to-night's paper? (*No reply.*) Give it to me.

CRANE (*deprecatingly*). Famariss —

SIR STEPHEN. Give it to me.

(*Crane gives it to him reluctantly.*)

(*Reading from paper.*) "Alarming illness of Sir Stephen Famariss. Angina pectoris. Fatal symptoms. Sir Stephen Famariss, the great engineer, is dying — " There 's nothing like making sure of your facts.

CRANE. Too sure!

SIR STEPHEN (*drily*). So I think. What do you say? How long am I going to live?

CRANE. Well —

SIR STEPHEN. Come out with it, old friend. I'm not afraid to hear.

CRANE. With the greatest care, I see no reason why you should n't live some weeks — or months.

SIR STEPHEN. Shall I live long enough to carry out my Milford Haven scheme? Tell me the truth.

CRANE. No. You certainly won't.

SIR STEPHEN (*shows intense disappointment*). You're sure?

CRANE. I'm sure.

SIR STEPHEN. But I shall live long enough to start it, to put it into other hands, into my son's hands — if the rebellious fool will only learn wisdom and make it up with me before I die. I shall live long enough for that?

CRANE. No. I fear not.

SIR STEPHEN (*going to bureau*). But I've got a third of it on paper. (*Taking out plans.*) I've kept it here. I've worked at it when I could n't sleep. If I can last out another six months, I can do it. Come, Crane, don't be stingy. Give me another six months! Eh?

CRANE. Famariss, you won't last six months even with the greatest care. You may not last six weeks —

SIR STEPHEN. Nor six days?

CRANE. Nor six days.

SIR STEPHEN. Nor six hours?

CRANE. Oh —!

SIR STEPHEN. Nor six hours. Thank you. I'm prepared.

CRANE. Your son has n't come yet?

SIR STEPHEN. No. I've telegraphed him twice — and my terms.

CRANE. Is it worth while — of course, you know best — is it worth while to stick out for terms when —?

SIR STEPHEN. When one is in face of death. Yes — on a matter of principle. If Dan comes here, he comes on my terms. I'll keep my word; I won't set eyes on him — he shan't pass that door until he owns he was wrong.

CRANE. But —

SIR STEPHEN (*getting excited*). But he was wrong. He was wrong, and no power on earth shall make me —

CRANE (*soothing him*). Hush! If he does come, you must avoid all excitement in meeting him. Your only chance of prolonging your life is to keep absolutely quiet. You must lay up all day —

SIR STEPHEN. Lay up all day! Don't talk nonsense!

CRANE. If you don't—

SIR STEPHEN. If I don't—

CRANE. You may die at any moment.

SIR STEPHEN. But if I do, I 'm dead already. No, Crane, I 'll live to my last moment, whenever it comes. When I do take to my bed, I 'll take to it once for all, in the churchyard, beside my Peggie! (*Very softly, very tenderly, half to himself.*) My Peggie! My Peggie! If I do go off, I shall see her again, I suppose—if it is n't all moonshine! Open the window, Nurse! It 's getting hot here! (*The Nurse opens window.*) Open that champagne, Crane, and pour yourself out a glass, and pour me out a glass. My Peggie! My Peggie! I wonder if it is all moonshine!

(*The musicians in the ballroom opposite begin to tune up their fiddles. Nurse comes down.*)

That 's right! Tune up! Tune up! And Peggie Lovel promised me the first dance! Tune up!

NURSE. You must keep quiet—

SIR STEPHEN (*pettishly*). Run away! Run away!

(*Crane makes Nurse a sign, and she goes off into bedroom. Crane has opened the champagne and poured out two glasses. He brings one to Sir Stephen.*)

It 's the eighty-four Saint Marceaux. I 've left you half what 's left of this, Crane, and I 've left my mule of a boy the other half. He 's my heir. I won't see him; no, not if I—

CRANE. Hush! Hush!

SIR STEPHEN. I won't see him unless he submits. But I 've left him every penny, except what goes to charities and churches. It 's very puzzling to know what to do with one's money, Crane. I 've left a heap to charities, and I 've squared all the churches. I hope it won't do much harm. (*A little chuckle.*) There 's one thing I regret in dying, Crane: I shan't be able to hear my funeral sermons. But you will—

CRANE. Don't make too sure. I may go off first; but if I am doomed, I hope the oratory will be of as good a vintage as this.

SIR STEPHEN. It ought to be, considering what I've left them all. Give them a hint, Crane, not to whitewash my sepulchre with any lying cant. Don't let them make a plaster-of-Paris saint of me! I won't have it! I won't have it! I've been a man, and never less than a man. I've never refused to do the work that came in my way, and, thank God, I've never refused to taste a pleasure. And I've had a rare good time in this rare good world. I wish I'd got to live it all over again!

CRANE. You do?

SIR STEPHEN. Yes; every moment of it, good and evil, pleasure and pain, love and work, success and failure, youth and age, I'd fill the cup again, and I'd drain it to the dregs if I could. You would n't?

CRANE. No. Once is enough for me.

SIR STEPHEN. You see, Crane, before starting in life, I took the one great step to secure success and happiness.

CRANE. What's that?

SIR STEPHEN. I made an excellent choice of my father and mother. Not rich. Not aristocratic. But a good, sound, healthy stock on both sides. What's the cause of all the weak, snivelling pessimism we hear? What's the cause of nine-tenths of the misery around us — ruined lives; shattered health; physical, moral, intellectual beggary? What's the cause of doctor's bills?

CRANE. Well, what is?

SIR STEPHEN. Men and women exercise no care in choosing their fathers and mothers. You doctors know it! You doctors know it! Once choose your father and mother wisely, and you can play all sorts of tricks with your constitution. You can drink your half-bottle of champagne at seventy-five and enjoy it! Another glass!

CRANE. No, I must be going! (*Rising.*) And (*tapping bottle*) you must n't take any more.

SIR STEPHEN. Don't talk nonsense! Sit down! Sit down! Another glass! Hobnob, man; hobnob! Life's but a span! Why, this may be the last time, eh?

CRANE. Any time may be the last time. Any moment may be the last moment.

SIR STEPHEN. Well, then, let's enjoy the last moment! I tell you, Crane, I'm ready. All my affairs are in perfect order. I should have liked to finish that Milford Haven scheme; but if it is n't to be — (*deep sigh*) — Hobnob, man; hobnob!

CRANE. What a lovely wine!

SIR STEPHEN. Is n't it? I remember Goethe says that the man who drinks wine is damned, but the man who drinks bad wine is doubly damned. Pray God you and I may be only damned once, Crane.

CRANE. Oh, that's past praying for — in my case!

SIR STEPHEN. Eighty-four! I was boring a hole through the Rockies that summer — ah, Crane, what glorious summers I've had! — seventy-five glorious golden summers — and now — Hobnob, man; hobnob! You've had a good innings, too, Crane.

CRANE. Hum! Pretty fair. I eat well, drink well, sleep well, get my early morning jog in the Park and enjoy it, get my two months on the moors, and enjoy them. I feel as fit to-day as I did thirty years ago. There's only one pleasure that fails me — (*with a grimace at Sir Stephen*) — Gone! Gone! Gone!

SIR STEPHEN. Don't fret about that! We thought it a pleasure, old crony, while it lasted. Now it's gone, let's call it a plague and a sin, and thank God for giving us a little peace in our old age. Ah, dear, dear, what a havoc women have made of the best half of my life; but — (*brightening*) — I've left some good work behind me, in spite of the hussies! And, thank Heaven, my *throat* has held out to the last.

[*Drinking.*

CRANE (*drinking*). And mine!

SIR STEPHEN. Crane, what was that joke that came up at poor Farley's funeral?

CRANE. Joke?

SIR STEPHEN. Don't you remember, while we were waiting for them to bring dear old Farley downstairs, Maidment began telling that story about the geese and the Scotch-boy —

CRANE. Yes, yes; to be sure!

[*Beginning to laugh.*

SIR STEPHEN. And just as we were enjoying the joke, we suddenly remembered where we were, and you pulled us up, and spoilt the joke!

CRANE. Yes, yes, I remember.

SIR STEPHEN. Crane, if Maidment tells that story at my funeral, don't pull him up —

CRANE. Eh?

SIR STEPHEN. It's a good joke, man! Don't waste it! Have your laugh out, and say from me that, other conditions being favourable, I'm enjoying it as heartily as any of you! You will, eh? You will?

CRANE. Yes, I will! I will!

[*They both laugh a little. Adams opens door left, and comes in a step.*

ADAMS. Miss Lovel has come, Sir Stephen.

SIR STEPHEN. Show her in, Adams.

[*Exit Adams.*

CRANE. I must be going.

[*Re-enter Adams, showing in Peggie Lovel, a débutante of eighteen, in her first ball dress; radiant, excited, beautifully dressed, a vision of girlish loveliness. She is frivolous and self-conscious, and full of little airs and graces, constantly glancing at herself in the two mirrors.*

ADAMS (*announcing*). Miss Lovel.

[*Exit Adams.*

SIR STEPHEN. Come in, Peggie. I must n't call you Peggie any more. Come in, Miss Lovel.

PEGGIE. Mamma said you would like to see me for a minute before the ball!

SIR STEPHEN. If you don't mind.

PEGGIE. How d' ye do, Sir Lydden?

[*Shaking hands.*

CRANE. How d' ye do, Miss Lovel? Good-night, Sir Stephen.

[*Holding out hand.*

SIR STEPHEN. Don't go, old chum.

[*Taking his hand, retaining it, keeping him.*

CRANE. I must. (*Taking out watch.*) I have a consultation at eleven.

SIR STEPHEN (*piteously*). Don't go, old chum.

CRANE. It 's really pressing. It 's Lord Albert Swale. He won't last till the morning.

SIR STEPHEN. Don't go. I may be meeting him soon, and I 'll make your apologies. (*Very piteously.*) Don't go, old chum!

CRANE. I must. (*Nurse enters from bedroom.*) Nurse, I want a word with you downstairs. (*Nurse crosses to left, and exit. To Sir Stephen.*) I 'll look in, the first thing in the morning.

SIR STEPHEN. Do. You 'll find me — at home.

CRANE. Good-night. Good-night, Miss Lovel.

PEGGIE. Good-night, Sir Lydden.

CRANE (*in a low tone to Peggie*). You must n't stay long, and you must n't let Sir Stephen excite himself. (*To Sir Stephen.*) I 'd rather see you in bed —

SIR STEPHEN (*very impatiently*). Tut! Tut! Tut! I won't be buried before I 'm dead. (*Rather curtly.*) Good-night.

(*Crane waits.*)

(*Imperiously.*) Good-night! (*Crane is going.*) And, Crane, remember — no whitewash on my sepulchre!

[*Exit Crane. Peggie meantime has taken off her cloak. All through she is eager and excited, glances at herself in the glasses very often.*

PEGGIE. I'm so sorry you're ill, Sir Stephen.

SIR STEPHEN. I'm not ill, my dear. The old machine seems just as strong and tough as ever, only — it's gone "crack" in a weak place. Well, I've knocked it about all over the world for seventy-five years, and if it had n't gone crack in one place, I suppose it would in another. Never mind me. Let's talk about you. Go and stand there, and let me look at you.

PEGGIE (*displaying her dress*). Do you like me? Do you like my dress?

SIR STEPHEN. It's a triumph!

PEGGIE (*chattering on*). You can't imagine what trouble mamma and I have taken over it. Long sleeves are coming in for evening wear. So I had long sleeves at first. I was all sleeves. So I had them taken out and short sleeves put in. The dressmaker made a horrible muddle of them. So we tried long sleeves again. I looked a perfect fright!

SIR STEPHEN. I won't believe it.

PEGGIE. Yes, I did, I assure you. So at the last moment I had the long sleeves taken out and the short sleeves dodged up with lace. Which do you like best? Long sleeves or short sleeves?

SIR STEPHEN. Long sleeves for ugly arms — short sleeves for beautiful arms!

PEGGIE (*frowning at him and shaking her head*). Ah! What do you think of the bodice?

SIR STEPHEN. Enchanting!

PEGGIE. It is rather neat, is n't it?

SIR STEPHEN. Neat? I should call it gorgeous!

PEGGIE. Oh, you must see the one I've got for the Lardners' dance next Monday. Would you like to see it?

SIR STEPHEN. Very much — on Monday.

PEGGIE. I'll run in for a moment before I go.

SIR STEPHEN. Do.

PEGGIE. That's a square-cut bodice. This is a round-cut

bodice. Which do you like best? Round-cut bodices, or square-cut bodices?

SIR STEPHEN. To-night I like round-cut bodices. On Monday I think I shall prefer square-cut bodices.

PEGGIE. I think I prefer a square-cut bodice. I had a square-cut bodice to this at first. I looked a perfect monster, so I had it taken out and this round-cut bodice put. I 'm not sure that it 's quite right now, and I 've tried it on fifty times — I 'm worrying you to death.

SIR STEPHEN. No! no!

PEGGIE. Yes, I am, and I can't stay five minutes. Are you sure you would n't rather have the ball put off? We will put it off even now, if you wish.

SIR STEPHEN. Not for the world! not for the world!

PEGGIE. That 's so good of you! But I really think you 'll be better to-morrow. I 'm sure you will. You aren't really very ill, are you? Do you like this embroidery?

[*Pointing to trimming on her skirt.*

SIR STEPHEN. It 's beautiful! Is n't it Indian work?

PEGGIE. Yes; handmade. It took a man twelve or fifteen years to make this one strip.

SIR STEPHEN. A quarter of a lifetime to decorate you for a few hours. It was time well spent. Ah, Peggie, that 's the sum and meaning of all our toil and money-grubbing!

PEGGIE. What is?

SIR STEPHEN. To make our women-folk beautiful. It all comes to that in the end. Let Nature and Art knock their heads together till doomsday, they 'll never teach one another any finer trick than to show a beautiful maiden to a handsome young fellow, or a handsome young fellow to a beautiful maiden.

[*Peggie has got behind him and is admiring herself in the glass.*

PEGGIE. Really! Really! Yes, I suppose you 're right. You 're sure I 'm not worrying you —

SIR STEPHEN. No, no. Don't go. I'm quite at leisure now to the end of my life.

PEGGIE. Oh, you must n't talk like that! So I may tell mamma that you like my dress? What do you think of the skirt?

SIR STEPHEN. Is n't there too much trimming on it?

PEGGIE. Oh, no! Oh, no!

SIR STEPHEN. Yes, there 's too much trimming.

PEGGIE. Oh, no! Oh, no! The dressmaker said there was n't enough.

SIR STEPHEN. Stupid hussies, dressmakers! They 're like other folks! They 're always the last to know anything about their own business. Tell your dressmaker that simplicity is the keynote of a great style in dressmaking, and engineering — subtle simplicity. The next time she is going to make you a dress, tell her to take a walk through our National Gallery —

PEGGIE. Oh, Sir Stephen, you surely would n't dress me like those old guys in the National Gallery! What would my partners say?

SIR STEPHEN. Your partners! Ah, you pretty tyrant, you 'll turn a great many heads, and set a great many hearts beating to-night!

PEGGIE. Shall I? Shall I?

SIR STEPHEN. Why, you 've set my old worn-out heart fluttering, and, goodness knows, it ought to have done beating for pretty girls at seventy-five — it ought to know better at seventy-five! But it does n't, and — (*rising with great determination*) — I 've a great mind —

PEGGIE (*a little alarmed*). Sir Stephen, what are you going to do?

SIR STEPHEN. Don't you remember your promise?

PEGGIE. My promise?

SIR STEPHEN. Your birthday party six years ago! You danced with me, and you promised that I should be your first partner at your first ball after you came out!

PEGGIE. Of course — I 'd forgotten!

SIR STEPHEN. But I had n't! Will you keep your promise, Peggie? Will you keep your promise?

PEGGIE. Would n't it be dangerous, and — you don't really wish it?

SIR STEPHEN (*sinking down*). You 're right, my dear. I 'm foolish with old age. Forgive me!

PEGGIE. I 'm sorry to disappoint you. But you 'll be able to see us dancing across the garden. You can stand at that window and look on.

SIR STEPHEN. Look on! That 's all I 'm fit for now — to look on at life!

[*Turning away his head.*

PEGGIE. Sir Stephen, what 's the matter?

SIR STEPHEN. I 've always been in the thick of the fight, Peggie. And I feel to-night as strong as ever I did, and they tell me I must lay up and look on — (*rising with great energy and determination*) — I won't! I won't!

PEGGIE. Sir Stephen!

SIR STEPHEN. I can't bear it, Peggie. I 've enjoyed my life, and I don't want to leave it. I want to live, and live, and live — and I will! Ah, what a selfish old coward I am! I 'm like a man who has sat down to a good table d'hôte, and eaten and drunk his fill, and now the host tells me my place is wanted for another guest, I cry out and want to have my dinner over again! Don't take any notice of me, dear. Tell me about your partners. Who 's going to dance with you to-night?

PEGGIE. Oh, I suppose Mr. Lascelles, Freddie Lister, Lord Doverbury, Johnny Butler, Sir Egerton Wendover, Dick French — amongst others.

SIR STEPHEN. Peggie —

PEGGIE. Yes —

SIR STEPHEN. You won't misunderstand me, dear. I 'm old enough to be your grandfather. (*Takes her hand very tenderly.*) You won't misunderstand me. (*Very seriously.*) Take care how you choose your partner for life. You 'll have a wide choice, and all your future

happiness, and the happiness perhaps of many generations to come, will depend on the one moment when you say "Yes" to one of the scores of young fellows who 'll ask you to be his wife. Take care, dear! Take care! Look him thoroughly up and down! Be sure that he has a good full open eye that can look you straight in the face; and be sure that the whites of his eyes are clear. Take care he has n't got a queer-shaped head, or a low forehead. A good round head, and a good full high forehead, do you hear? Notice the grip of his hand when he shakes hands with you! Take care it 's strong and firm, and not cold and dry. No young man should have a cold, dry hand. Don't say "Yes" till you 've seen him out of trousers, in riding dress, or court dress. Look at the shape of his legs — a good, well-shaped leg, eh, Peggie? And take care it is his leg! See that he 's well-knit and a little lean, not flabby; does n't squint; does n't stammer; has n't got any nervous tricks or twitchings. Don't marry a bald man! They say we shall all be bald in ten generations. Wait ten generations, Peggie, and then don't marry a bald man! Can you remember all this, dear? Watch his walk! See that he has a good springy step, and feet made of elastic — can do his four or five miles an hour without turning a hair. Don't have him if he has a cough in the winter or the spring. Young men ought never to have a cough. And be sure he can laugh well and heartily — not a snigger, or a wheeze, or a cackle, but a good, deep, hearty laugh right down from the bottom of his chest. And if he has a little money, or even a good bit, so much the better! There now! You choose a man like that, Peggie, and I won't promise you that you 'll be happy, but if you 're not, it won't be your fault, and it won't be his, and it won't be mine!

PEGGIE. Very well, Sir Stephen, I 'll try and remember.

SIR STEPHEN. Do, my dear, do! It 's a good legacy, my

dear. I've left you another. You won't be disappointed when my will 's read —

PEGGIE. Oh, Sir Stephen!

SIR STEPHEN. No, you won't; but remember my advice to-night. That 's the best wedding present for any girl.

PEGGIE. Very well, Sir Stephen! I must be going. Good-bye.

[*Giving her hand.*

SIR STEPHEN. Yes, I suppose you must n't stay. (*Taking her hand, keeping it as he had kept Crane's, as if he could n't bear to let her go.*) Good-bye.

[*Looking longingly at her with a mute entreaty to stay. Peggie draws her hand away, puts on cloak, and goes to door, left. He watches her all the while.*

PEGGIE (*at door, runs back to him*). Sir Stephen, I 'll keep my promise. You shall be my first partner. (*Offering her card.*) Write your name down for my first dance.

SIR STEPHEN. But I shan't be there.

PEGGIE. I 'll sit out, and keep it for you.

SIR STEPHEN. No, no —

PEGGIE. Yes, yes! I insist. Put your name down!

(*He writes on her card. Enter Nurse.*)

Good-bye, Sir Stephen.

SIR STEPHEN. Good-bye, Peggie! (*Softly.*) Peggie! Her name was Peggie! My wife's name was Peggie!

[*She bends and kisses his forehead; then goes to door, turns and looks at him.*

PEGGIE. Au 'voir.

[*Blows him a kiss and exit. Sir Stephen looks longingly after her, walks a little up and down the room.*

NURSE (*anxiously*). Sir Stephen, don't you think you might lie down now?

SIR STEPHEN. Run away! Run away!

NURSE. Won't you rest a little on the sofa?

SIR STEPHEN. Run away! Run away!

NURSE. Can I get you anything?

SIR STEPHEN. Run away! Run away! (*Pacing up and down.*) Mr. Daniel Famariss has n't come yet?

NURSE. No. You know they said that he was away surveying in an out-of-the-way country, where no message could reach him.

SIR STEPHEN. If he should come too late, tell him — tell him — I 've gone surveying in an out-of-the-way country — where no message can reach me! (*Changing tone.*) Dear me, Nurse, I 'm afraid this dying is going to be a very tiresome business for both of us!

NURSE. Oh, Sir Stephen, I 'm sure I don't mind!

SIR STEPHEN. You don't mind? That 's very good of you. You 're in no hurry? Well, neither am I.

NURSE. Sir Stephen, don't you think —

SIR STEPHEN. What?

NURSE. Last night you said you 'd send for a clergyman.

SIR STEPHEN. Did I? That was at two o'clock in the morning. How horribly demoralised a man gets at two o'clock in the morning!

NURSE. But, Sir Stephen —

SIR STEPHEN. Well?

NURSE. Don't you think you ought to begin to think of better things?

SIR STEPHEN. Well. I 'm seventy-five. Perhaps it is nearly time. What better things?

NURSE. Death and — judgment.

SIR STEPHEN. Don't talk nonsense. I don't call death and judgment better things.

NURSE. But, Sir Stephen — you will be judged.

SIR STEPHEN. Judged? Yes. But I shan't be judged by the prayers I 've said and the psalms I 've sung. I shan't be judged by the lies I 've told, and the deceits I 've practised, and the passions I 've given way to. I shan't be judged by the evil and rottenness in me. No; I shall be judged by the railways I 've made, and the canals I 've scooped, and the bridges I 've built — and let me tell you, my dear creature, my accounts are in

good order, and ready for inspection at any moment, and I believe there 's a good balance on my side. (*Guests have been assembling in the ballroom. Dance music bursts out. Dancing begins.*) Ah! What tune is that? [*Goes up to window, begins dancing a few steps, swaying with the music.*

NURSE (*frightened*). Sir Stephen! Sir Stephen!

SIR STEPHEN. Run away! Run away!

NURSE. Sir Stephen, you would n't be found dancing at the end?

SIR STEPHEN. Why not? I've done my work! Why should n't I play for a little while? (*A bell is heard.*) Hark! The front-door bell —

NURSE. Yes.

[*Goes to door, left.*

SIR STEPHEN. Go downstairs and see if that 's my son. If it is, tell him —

[*Gentle knock at door, left. Adams enters a step. The dancing and music are continued in the ballroom.*

ADAMS. I beg pardon, Sir Stephen. Mr. Daniel Famariss has arrived —

SIR STEPHEN. Ah!

[*Getting excited.*

ADAMS. And would like to see you.

SIR STEPHEN. Tell him he knows the conditions.

NURSE. But, Sir Stephen —

SIR STEPHEN. Run away, my good soul! Run away. (*To Adams.*) He knows the conditions. If he accepts them, I shall be pleased to see him.

DAN (*voice outside door*). Father!

SIR STEPHEN. Shut that door!

[*Adams nearly closes door, which is kept open a few inches from the other side.*

DAN (*outside*). Father! You won't shut the door in my face?

SIR STEPHEN. Keep on that side of it, then. Adams, you can go. Leave the door ajar.

(*Exit Adams, left. Sir Stephen, with an imperious gesture, points Nurse to archway right. Exit Nurse, into bedroom, with an appealing gesture to Sir Stephen. Sir Stephen goes to door; it is still open a few inches.*) Are you there, Dan?

DAN (*outside*). Yes, father.

SIR STEPHEN. I vowed I'd never set eyes on you again, till you owned you were wrong about those girders. You were wrong? (*No reply.*) You were wrong? (*No reply.*) Do you hear? Confound you, you know you were wrong! (*No reply.*) Do you hear, Dan? Why won't you say you were wrong? You won't! (*Slams door, goes right, has an outburst of anger, recovers, listens, goes back to door, opens it a little.*) Are you there, Dan?

DAN (*outside*). Yes, father.

SIR STEPHEN. You were wrong, Dan. (*No reply.*) I haven't got long to live, Dan. It's angina pectoris, and the next attack will kill me. It may come at any moment. (*Very piteously.*) Dan, you were wrong? Why won't you say so? Even if you tell a lie about it?

DAN (*outside*). I was wrong.

SIR STEPHEN. Ah! (*Flings open the door, Dan runs in. Sir Stephen meets him, embraces him affectionately, with a half sob.*) Why didn't you say it before? You knew how much I loved you. Why did you keep apart from me all these years?

DAN. I'm sorry, sir. But perhaps it was for the best. I've done very well.

SIR STEPHEN. Of course you have. You're my son. But how much better you'd have done if you had stuck to me! How much better we both should have done! I'm sorry, too, Dan. I was wrong, too — not about the girders. You *were* wrong about them, Dan. But I was wrong to be angry and to swear I wouldn't see you. Ah, what could I have done with you at my side! I could have carried out my Milford Haven scheme. Per-

haps it is n't too late! (*Going to bureau, getting more and more excited.*) I've got all the plans here—

[*Takes out a heap of plans.*

DAN. Not now, father; not now!

SIR STEPHEN. Yes, now, my boy! To-morrow may be too late! (*Going to table.*) Come here, my lad! Oh, Dan, what years we've wasted! Come here! I want you to carry this out. You'll have immense opposition. Beat it down! You'll have to buy Shadwell and his lot. They're a dirty gang. But you'll have to do it. I hate bribery, Dan; but when you've got to do it, do it thoroughly! Then there's Mincham. Buy him over, if you can, at a small figure — say a thousand pounds — he's a mean little cur; but offer him that, and if he won't take it, snap your fingers at him, and swamp him! Remember the trick, the scoundrel's trick, he served me over the granite for the viaduct. Remember it, Dan, and don't spare him! Swamp him! Swamp him![1]

[*With great energy of hate.*

DAN. Father —

SIR STEPHEN. Bring your chair up. I must go on now — while it's all before me! I want you to carry this Milford Haven scheme out! I want it to be said that what old Stephen Famariss could n't do, young Dan Famariss could! The father was a great man, the son shall be a greater, eh? Look here, you must start on this side. I've had all the soundings made —

DAN. To-morrow, father; to-morrow!

SIR STEPHEN. No, now! There's no such thing as to-morrow! We'll go through it now — in case — There's a great world-tussle coming, Dan — I shan't live to see it — but it's coming, and the engineer that ties England and America will do a good turn to both countries. England to America in four days! I want that crown to rest on your head! Look! You must begin here! Look! Just there! You must throw a bridge over —

[1] 1 Kings ii. 8, 9.

[*Stops suddenly, puts his hand to his heart; his face indicates intense agony. Nurse enters from bedroom.*

DAN. Father —

SIR STEPHEN (*persisting, with a wild aimless gesture*). Throw a bridge from here — to the other side, and then —

DAN. Father, what is it?

SIR STEPHEN. The end, Dan. (*His face shows that he is suffering great pain. A great burst of dance music. They offer to support him. He waves them off.*) No, thank you. I'll die standing. England to America in four days. (*Long pause. He stands bolt upright with great determination.*) You were wrong about those girders, Dan — My Peggie — I wonder if it's all moonshine — Peggie — My Peggie —

[*Dies, tumbles over table. Music and dancing in ballroom louder than ever.*

CURTAIN

GRACE MARY

A TRAGEDY IN CORNISH DIALECT
IN ONE ACT

Characters

Nick Pentargan
Isaac Roseveare
Luke Jago
Barzillai Teague
Peter Hoblyn
Joshua Webber
Grace Mary Roseveare
Elizabeth Teague
Miners, Peasants, Fisher-People

GRACE MARY

SCENE. *The exterior of "All Travellers' Inn" on the North Cornish Coast. Summer night. Misty moonlight. The inn is on the right, with a covered shelter outside, in which are placed rough tables, with forms on each side. On the tables are tankards and mugs. The inn window looks out on the shelter and is open. A bright light from the inn illumines the tables and the persons seated there. The door of the inn is down stage, left, and also opens into the shelter. Over the shelter is a weather-beaten signboard with "All Travellers' Inn, by Barzillai Teague" painted on it. On the left of the stage is Isaac Roseveare's cottage, set diagonally; its windows look on the stage; the window of Grace Mary's room, on the top floor, is shut, and the curtains drawn apart. The window is lighted. The door of the cottage is approached by a short flight of stone steps at the corner of the house; the door, being round the corner, is not seen. At back of stage is the cliff line, and at a great distance below is the sea, the horizon line being scarcely discernible. Growing up from the cliff is a solitary tree with its branches blown landwards, its trunk rooted in the cliff beneath the edge.*

Discover Elizabeth Teague clearing up tankards, mugs, etc., from tables. Barzillai Teague, a little lame, bloated, jovial innkeeper, hobbles on, right.

ELIZABETH. Barzillai, you 've been drenking again.

BARZILLAI. Elizabeth, answer me this, ain't ut better to be drunk nor thirsty?

ELIZABETH. Ef yu must git drunk, why caan't 'ee git drunk upon your awn liquor an' your awn premises?

BARZILLAI. Elizabeth, my liquor is gashly, an yu'me on

my premises. An' the man that gits drunk in the company of hez wife, ez no better than a baistly fule. Naw, my dear sawl, when I do git drunk I 've got better taste nor to get drunk with you, Elizabeth. I du chuse my company.

ELIZABETH (*regarding him*). An' whose company ev 'ee bin drenkin' in to-day?

BARZILLAI. Braave company, sure enough, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. Whose, then?

BARZILLAI. I 've been drenkin' with — Shaan't tell 'ee, Elizabeth.

[*Grace Mary opens her window in the cottage, candle in hand; looks out. She is a very pale, delicate girl, about twenty, with a wasted, unearthly look in her face. Barzillai points her out to Elizabeth.*

GRACE MARY (*peering out into the darkness for a few moments, calls gently*). Nick! Are 'ee theere, my awn dear swateheart?

[*Waits a moment, listens, and then withdraws from window, draws the curtains together, leaves the window open. A few seconds after, the light disappears from the curtains.*

ELIZABETH. Aw, poor sawl, her du graw moar an' moar like a speerit every day.

BARZILLAI. Hur did look for oal the world as ef hur had just comed up from the dead, did n't hur?

ELIZABETH. Hur ev niver held up hur head since Nick Pentargan went away.

BARZILLAI. Well, hur can hauld it up now, for Nick Pentargan ev cum hum agen.

ELIZABETH. What?

BARZILLAI. I 've been with un oal the afternune.

ELIZABETH. An' that 's the reason as yu'me in this baistly staate.

BARZILLAI. Hauld thy tongue, Elizabeth. 'T ez only fules that don't know the valee an' happiness of gitting drunk that fly out against us — philosophers.

(*Grace Mary enters from cottage, as if restless; goes up right, looks off, crosses to left, looks off, comes up to them disquieted.*)

I hope yu'me better to-night, Grace Mary.

GRACE MARY. Is there any tidings down along?

BARZILLAI. Naw. Naw tidings down along.

GRACE MARY. Are 'ee sure?

BARZILLAI. Tidings consarning of who, Grace Mary?

GRACE MARY. Consarning of somewan that left hereabouts six months agone.

BARZILLAI (*pause*). Naw. (*Pause.*) What makes 'ee ax?

GRACE MARY. Because oal day long, I 've had a sooart of a drawing pain here — (*with her hand upon her heart*) — as if he wur a drawing me toward un.

BARZILLAI. How so?

GRACE MARY. Like as if I wur aslape, and heerd un a calling out to me for to come and help un — and I could n't neither answer un, nor go to un, 'cause theere was like mountains atop of me.

BARZILLAI. Aw! 'T is straange, sure enough! But don't 'ee think anything more about un, theer 's a dear maiden, or you 'll never be braave and strong agen.

GRACE MARY. I shall never git strong again till I du know for sure that oal 's well weth him. (*Goes to cottage, comes back very entreatingly.*) Would 'ee be so gude as to go down along to the village, and ax if theere 's any tidings of un. I knaw 't is fulish of me, but ye doan't knaw the ache as I 've got about heere.

[*Putting her hand on her heart.*

ELIZABETH. Tell her, Barzillai.

[*Exit Elizabeth into inn. Grace Mary looks at Barzillai; he looks down.*

GRACE MARY (*suddenly*). He 's heere! I knawed it! You 've seed un? Wheere?

BARZILLAI. Down to Camelford.

GRACE MARY (*frantic with joy*). How does he look? Did he ax after me? What did ye tell un about me? Is he

coming here? He'd niver laive thaise paarts without coming to see me?

BARZILLAI. Bide a bit quiet now, there's a dear maiden, or I waun't tell 'ee nort.

GRACE MARY. Tell me oal. Is he well? (*Very softly and searchingly.*) Ev he departed from hez evil coorses?

BARZILLAI. Well —

[*Looks uncomfortable.*

GRACE MARY. Daun't 'ee desave me now!

BARZILLAI. He wor oaless a bit wild, an' he oaless will be. 'T ez the natur of un.

GRACE MARY. He wur drenking?

BARZILLAI. I hope theer's no gurt harm in a drap, wheere the liquor's gude.

GRACE MARY. Wheere did you laive un?

RRAZILLAI. He wur coming tooards the village.

GRACE MARY. To see me?

BARZILLAI. Not azackly.

GRACE MARY. What vor then?

BARZILLAI. He wur gwine to seek Luke Jago.

GRACE MARY. What vor? I've nivver gived un cause for anger agen Luke.

BARZILLAI. Well, 't ez knawn down along that Luke did persuade your vaather to part Nick an' you, 'cos Luke did want 'ee for hezzelf.

GRACE MARY. Iss — an' ivver since Nick went away Luke ev been spaiking evil about un to vaather. I ud n't wed Luke Jago, no, not if theere were n't another chap in the world. An' Nick du knaw ut; he du knaw that my haart ud break avore it ud ev a thought as worn't for him.

BARZILLAI. Well, theere's bad blood 'tween un and Luke; iss sure, vor Nick du knaw 't is Luke as parted 'ee — that's oal I can tell 'ee.

[*Going into inn.*

GRACE MARY. I caan't abide heere an' knaw he's so nigh me without spaking to un. I mus' come to 'ee, Nick.

[*Going off, above cottage, meets Isaac Roseveare, who enters.*

ISAAC (*a stern old Cornish Methodist*). Wheere be gwine, Grace Mary? (*Turns to Barzillai.*) You 've tould her that devil's cheeld is cummed home agen?

BARZILLAI. Naw, Isaac — 't wur her awn haart as tould her. Thee 's best laive hur to go to un.

[*Exit Barzillai into inn.*

ISAAC. You wor gwine to seek Nick Pentargan?

GRACE MARY. Iss, vaather.

ISAAC. You did promise to give un up for ivver.

GRACE MARY. I did n't promise I ud n't see un an' spake to un.

ISAAC. Grace, thy haart is longing vor un still.

GRACE MARY. I caan't help ut, vaather.

ISAAC. Would 'ee wed a drunkard, a swearer, a loose-liver, a castaway?

GRACE MARY. Daun't 'ee caal un hard naames. 'Tent ez fault. Sims us ef a wor born to bad luck. Do 'ee caal to mind what his hum were when he wor a cheeld; hez awn mawther ded ev no pity on un, an' wished evil on un. An' ez vaather wur an evil man —

ISAAC. Iss, an' hez grandvaather. The Pentargans wor oaless evil-doers. An' why does thy haart cling to un continually?

GRACE MARY. I caen't tell 'ee why. The moar wicked an' miserable Nick ez, the moar he du seem to caal vor my pity an' luv. I du veel vor un like es ef I wer ez mawther, an' he wor helpless an' stretching out ez arms to me — I du veel I must go to un.

ISAAC. What?

GRACE MARY. You du knaw 't ez not contrariness with me. I ev allays obeyed 'ee, and I allays will till the end of ut.

ISAAC. God bless 'ee, my dearie. I knaw 't ez thy haart an' not thy will that loves that devil's cheeld.

GRACE MARY. Iss, 't ez my haart, and maybe my will too.

ISAAC. Let un aloan. Let un answer vor hez sins wheere he's accountable, an' kape out of our path.

GRACE MARY. Aw, vaather, the power of luv is wonderful. Theere's luv enow in my haart to burn up oal the wickedness in Nick Pentargan, ef a wur twenty times the devil's cheeld!

ISAAC. What?

GRACE MARY. Aw, doan't 'ee be angry with me.

ISAAC. Naw, my dear, I won't be angry with 'ee.

GRACE MARY. I du feel sartin sure, vaather, that if you would lev us wed, I could saave un, vaather — 't ez hez oanly chaance. Daun't 'ee deny me. 'T ez my sawl as shall answer for ez.

ISAAC. Then thy sawl will be lost. 'T ez lies that a woman can saave a man. A man must save hezzelf, if a's saved at oal. An' let Nick Pentargan save hezzelf.

GRACE MARY. But he caen't; he 'll be losted.

ISAAC. So be it then, if so be as my Grace Mary en't losted with un.

GRACE MARY. Aw, daun't 'ee part us, vaather!

ISAAC. Harkee, my dear, yu'me oal I've got in the woorld. I luv 'ee more than oal the woorld. I would raather see thee a laying dead in thee bed upsteers theere (*pointing to her window*) than wed to Nick Pentargan. Now plaise yourself, my dearie, an' wed un if you will!

GRACE MARY. You du knaw, vaather, as I've oallus obeyed 'ee, and I shall obey 'ee now.

ISAAC (*kisses her*). I thank God for giving me an obedient cheeld. 'T ez gitting late. Come indoors and play thy music to me, an' we 'll forget un.

[*Leading her to the door.*

GRACE MARY. But, vaather, ef Nick should come to-night, you wan't forbid me to spake to un?

ISAAC. 'T would do nort but pain thee, my dear. Be my braave maiden, and promise me ef Nick comes thee waun't spake to un, or make a sign to un.

GRACE MARY. Vaather, I caen't. Ef Nick do come, the very haart will laip out of my body to meet un.

ISAAC. Ef thy eye offend thee, pluck it out. Ef thy right hand offend thee, cut it off. 'T ez but wan stroke. 'T ez thy sawl, thy aun dear sawl, as I plaid for.

GRACE MARY. But Nick's sawl — I do care mooare for hez dear sawl nor vor my awn.

ISAAC. Theest made an idol of un. He stands 'tween thy God an' thee.

GRACE MARY. Naw, naw, vaather.

ISAAC. Iss, iss. Do as I tell 'ee. Do as I command thee. Naw, naw, I daun't command thee, I intreat thee. For love of thy dear mawther as ev gone avore, for haupe of seeing her agen wheere theere 's no partin's, bring thy stubborn haart to its knees — make it obey thee. Say the words after me: "I du promise thee, vaather, ef Nick Pentargan du come to-night" —

GRACE MARY. "I du promise 'ee, vaather, if Nick Pentargan du come to-night" —

ISAAC. "I will not spake to un wan word" —

GRACE MARY. "I will not spake to un wan word" —

ISAAC. "Or make any sign whatsomever" —

GRACE MARY. "Or make any sign whatsomever" —

ISAAC. "Or look at un, or think on un."

GRACE MARY. Not think on un? Aw, vaather, how can I help ut?

ISAAC. Tear un out from thee haart! Do ut, my dear, an' be at peace. Promise after me. "I will not look at un, or think one thought of un, of my aun free will."

GRACE MARY (*with great effort*). "I will not look at him, or think one thought of him — of my aun free will." I've said it, vaather.

ISAAC. An' thou 'll do ut?

GRACE MARY. So vur as God gives me graace.

ISAAC. An' He will. Thee 'll be in great peace soon, my dear.

GRACE MARY. Iss, but 't will be like the peace of them as

are dead. The peace of well-doing en't so calm and quieting as the peace of the churchyard, ez ut, vaather?

[*Noise of riotous laughing and shouting heard off left.*

ISAAC (*looks off*). Go indoors, my dear —

GRACE MARY. Sims I heerd hes voice —

[*Trying to look off, right.*

ISAAC (*stopping her, sternly*). Thy promise! Go indoors, an' set thyself to thy music. 'T will drown ez voice, an' 't will drown the thought of un out of thy mind. (*Burst of uproarious laughter.*) Iss, play thy music — and (*very solemnly*) remember thy promise. Thee waun't break ut?

[*With great earnestness.*

GRACE MARY (*same tone of great earnestness*). No. I shall kape ut, vaather.

[*Another riotous burst of laughter off, left. She shows pain. She goes into cottage. Enter Luke Jago, left.*

LUKE. He 's coming with seven worser sperrits nor hezzelf, an' a du swear by oal that 's holy as he 'll make thee aupen thy doors to un, an' laive un to spake to ez awn dear maid.

ISAAC. Ez maid? A du call her ez maid?

LUKE. Iss, and a du swear as nort shall part them. Isaac, you waun't go back on your word to me? I du love her sore. Isaac, you waun't laive her wed Nick Pentargan?

ISAAC. Naw, she shall nivver wed Nick Pentargan — that I du vow.

LUKE. An' maybe, when time has gone by — her haart ull turn from un, an' she 'll wed me.

ISAAC. That shall be as God plaises.

[*Enter Nick Pentargan, a young fellow about thirty, half-drunk, wildly excited, at the head of a rabble, among whom are Peter Hoblyn, a sailor, and Joshua Webber. Isaac and Nick stand confronting each other. Pause.*

NICK (*civilly*). Gude-evenin', Isaac.

(*Isaac looks at him sternly and then goes towards steps. Nick intercepts him, stands at the bottom of steps.*

Nick doffs his cap, half-respectfully, half-mockingly, with great politeness.) Gude-evenin', Isaac Roseveare. (*Isaac makes a movement to pass him. Nick mounts one or two steps; in a fierce tone.*) Naw, Isaac. You daun't go in to your house till you 've passed the time o' day weth me. (*Pause.*) Come now, Isaac, find your gude manners, and wish me "Gude-evenin'."

[*Pause.*

ISAAC (*calls to the door*). Grace Mary. Theere stands a man at my door — you du knaw who 't ez. Kape thy promise, my dear. Lock my door in ez face.

[*Pause. The lock turns. Nick shows pain and despair for some moments, then pulls himself together with a defiant air.*

NICK (*arms akimbo, planted firmly on steps*). Oal the saame, Isaac, thou shalt pass the time o' day with me avore I let thee in, aye, that thou shalt, ef I kape thee waiting heere tell 't is time for us boath to be judged, an' thou du go up along, while I — aw, my sonnies — I du wonder wheere the devil I shall go.

[*Grace Mary's voice heard singing the evening hymn, accompanied by an accordion. Nick shows that he is touched. After a line of the hymn the voice falters, and breaks down, music stops.*

ISAAC (*speaking at the door*). Ev 'ee brokken down, my dear? Try again, an' God give thee courage.

NICK. Isaac, vor hur saake — spake a paisible word to me.

ISAAC. I daun't knaw 'ee, Nick Pentargan.

NICK. Sonnies, do 'ee go inside, an' laive me to ev a word or two weth Isaac aloane. Oal of 'ee.

(*The men go into the inn, except Luke, who stands there. Nick to Luke.*) Dost 'ee hear, Luke or Judas, or whatsomever thy naame ez. Thee 'st done me harm enow. Tak' thyself away — about thy business.

(*Luke sneaks into the inn after the others. Nick and Isaac are left alone.*)

Isaac, thee would n't see me ruined body an' sawl.

ISAAC (*sternly*). Daun't I tell 'ee, I daun't knaw 'ee.

NICK. Nay, but thou shalt knaw me.

ISAAC. Who art thee, then?

NICK. I 'm the devil's cheeld that luvs thy daughter, an' if thee daun't laive me see her, an'—

[*Raises his arm as if to strike Isaac.*

ISAAC. Would 'ee strike me?

NICK. Naw. But I du main to come to her.

ISAAC. Hur ev vowed to her God hur 'll ev nort to do weth 'ee.

NICK. 'T ez 'er lips ev vowed. Hur haart would nivver du ut.

ISAAC. She 'll kape her word.

NICK. Naw, thee 'll set her free from ut. Hearkee, Isaac. My life, my immortal sawl, are bound up weth hurs. Ax hur if t en't so; ax if there en't a bond between hur an' me that God ezzelf ev set ez sale on, an' can nivver be broke assunder.

ISAAC. 'T ez broke. An' thou thyself ev broke ut.

NICK. How?

ISAAC. By thy awn evil life. I ded promise the maid to 'ee ef thee would laive thy evil ways, and thee didst promise to du ut. How did thee kape thy word?

NICK. 'T en't no fault of mine, Isaac. Thee dost knaw the history of me, an' oal of us.

ISAAC. Iss, as all thy vore-vaathers ev been, so wilt thou be to the end.

NICK. Naw, Isaac. Theere 's my salvation inside thy doors. Theere 's evil in me—I knaw ut well. When I 'm away from hur, sims to me, I 'm moast oal evil. But when I du come anigh to hur, hur du quicken the gudeness in me into a flame, an' I 'm moast oal gude. Isaac, I 've a come back to hev a new life weth hur vor my awn der wife. Daun't 'ee part us. I 'll change from thez hour.

ISAAC. I 've a read somewheere about the leopard changing ez spots, an' the Ethiopian changing ez skin, but I

daun't believe as 't wor ivver proved. Hearken, Nick, if thee du waunt to wed Grace Mary, thee tek thyself awaay to Africa, an' go an' bring me back a leopard with hez skin changed to a lamb's, or an Ethiopian weth ez flesh changed to be white like wan ov our English babes — bring either wan or other ov thaise two animals, and I 'll believe then that ye can do good ez are accustomed to do evil; I 'll believe that a devil's cheeld like you can be changed into an angel of light, ef you wor to wed my Grace Mary. An' I 'll give her to 'ee. But I 'll nivver give her to 'ee till then, so help me God.

[*Turns to go. Nick shows great despair. Accordion plays again. Nick and Isaac listen, much affected.*

NICK (*in a low tone, in great despair*). Then 't ez oal over 'tween hur an' me, Isaac?

ISAAC. Iss sure. Make theeself sure of that.

[*Going up steps.*

NICK. Isaac —

[*Approaching him.*

ISAAC. Say on.

NICK (*very quiet and appealingly*). When I du laive this plaace to-night, I du laive like Cain, a wanderer an' a vagabond on the vaace of the earth. I shall nivver see hur again, or spaik to hur, or hear hur voice — but I shall live an' wander on, an' on, an' on for years an' years, with nort to live an' wander for. An' my haart is feerly dead within me. I du wish 't would plaise Heaven to mak' an end of me heer an' now —

ISAAC. Aw, how can thee speak sa wickedly?

NICK. 'Cause 't ez how I du feel. Theere 's no taste ef life left in me withut hur. Sims to me as I caan't vaace it now. But if hur tells me hurself that hur ev cast me off, then I du promise 'ee, Isaac, I 'll give thee no vurther trouble, an' I 'll nivver see thee nor hur agen, but I ll drag on till I drop into my grave. But let me hear from hur awn dear lips as hur ev giv' me up.

ISAAC. Naw. 'T would only pain hur. Vor hur saake, tek thyself off when I du bid thee.

NICK. Naw. Let her send me away, an' I 'll go.

ISAAC. Naw, thee shaan't see hur.

NICK. Nay, but I will.

ISAAC (*goes up, stands at top of steps, knocks at door*). Grace Mary. Thee du knaw who is outside. Ef thee will kape thy vow an' save thy sawl, unlock thez door, an' the very next moment go upstairs to thy awn room, an' lock thyself in so that no wan can come anigh thee. But ef thou wult brake thy word, an' be losted for ivver, bide downstairs an' spaik to him agenst thy vow. Chuse between thez man an' thy God.

[*Pause. The lock is heard to turn. Isaac holds the door-handle a few seconds. Nick runs eagerly up the steps. A light appears in Grace Mary's room above. Isaac opens the door, looks eagerly in, and then points triumphantly inside to Nick. Nick shows great despair. Exit Isaac into cottage, shuts door; lock is heard to turn again. Nick comes down the steps in great despair, walks up and down for a moment or two.*

NICK (*shouts into inn*). Hi, my sonnies! Hi, Barzillai — wheere be 'ee, oal of ye? Hi! Hi! Hi!

[*Enter from inn the drinkers, Joshua, Peter, and Barzillai.*

BARZILLAI. What ez ut, Nick?

NICK. I du want to ev just wan pleasant evenin' with oal of ye avore I du laive ye. What 'll 'ee take, Peter?

PETER. Saame as avore, Barzillai.

NICK. Josh?

JOSHUA. I sez ditto.

NICK. An' you, David?

DAVID. I caan't du better I spoase nor kape to Plymouth gin.

NICK. Not ef 'ee waant to send thee head burning maazed

and mad like mine. Barzillai, tek the orders vrom oal. (*Barzillai takes orders and then goes into inn. Luke Jago enters from inn.*)

Aw, yu'me theere, Luke Jago?

LUKE. Iss.

NICK. 'T wer yu as set hur vaather again' me.

LUKE. I did think I wer' doing Graace Maary a brave gude turn to kape her from wedding thee, Nick.

NICK. Well, ye 've done ut. Sit ye down. (*Points to chair.*) What 'll ye take to drink?

LUKE. I waun't drink weth ye.

NICK. Yu shall drink two helths weth me to-night avore we du part. Set down, or I 'll force thee, an' pour the liquor down thy droaat an' stop the lies from coming up ut. (*Very sternly and threateningly.*) Set down when I tell 'ee!

(*Luke sits. Barzillai and Elizabeth enter from inn with liquor, which guests take. Elizabeth fills glasses up with water.*)

(*To Luke*). What will 'ee take?

LUKE. I daun't caare — what thee plaizes.

NICK. Barzillai, do 'ee bring Luke Jago and me a double portion o' Plymouth gin — a double portion vor Luke, 'cause 't ez ez helth we'me gwine to drenk. An' a double portion vor me, 'cause the more liquor I du drenk, the sooner I shall forget the sweet angel that is losted to me vor ivver.

(*Glancing up at Grace Mary's window, shows remorse; a gesture of throwing it off. Exit Barzillai.*)

Wait a bit, sonnies, daun't 'ee drenk till I get my liquor an' gie 'ee the toast. 'T ez the helth of oal snakes, an' sly, underhand, mischief-making varmin as I du want 'ee oal to drenk.

(*Luke rises angrily.*)

Aw, thee dost knaw as I main thee. Sit down. Sit down, I tell 'ee.

(*Luke sits, slowly. Enter Barzillai with two glasses*

nearly filled with spirits, and a decanter of water. Nick takes his cup.)

A double portion! 'T ez gude.

BARZILLAI. Thee 'st better put some water 'long weth ut, Nick. 'T ez a powerful sperrut.

NICK. Daun't I tell 'ee I want to drown my thoughts so deep — (*glancing in agony at window*) — so deep that they 'll nivver rise up agen. Now, my sonnies, heere 's to oal sichy sly snakes as Luke Jago. (*To Luke, threateningly.*) Drenk when I tell 'ee.

(*Luke drinks. Nick tosses his off at one gulp.*)

That 's braave. Drenk it oal up. Oal of ye. I du start awaay frum heereabouts to-morrow morn — (*speaking the words at the open window*) — an' none of ye wan't nivver see me again (*calling up at window*). An' I du want ye oal to wish me luck on my journey.

BARZILLAI. Whichey way be gwine, Nick?

NICK. I 'm gwine strait hum to my vaather Nick. So cumraades oal, put a braave vaace on ut, an' giv' me a comfortable start on my travels. (*Pointing down.*) Luke Jago, I towld 'ee ye should drenk twice weth me avore we parted. I rackon yu 'll be plaised to drenk to my sawl's destruction and ruin, waun't 'ee.

LUKE (*venomously*). Iss, with oal my haart.

[*A long moan from Grace Mary's window.*

NICK (*suddenly runs to window with a cry of compunction*). Naw, naw, my dear angel, I daun't main ut! Spaik wan word to me, my awn swaithaart!

[*Pause.*

LUKE. Caal a little louder! (*Pause.*) Mayhap hur 's deaf or aslaip.

NICK. Grace Mary, my haart 's brokken! I 'm feer dying for a sight ov 'ee. Ef you 've promised you waun't spaik, do 'ee put yer hand in token yu forgev me. Dost 'ee heer?

LUKE. Laive off thy clacketing, an' tek theeself away, thee dog in the manger.

NICK. Grace Mary, spaik to me! Awnly wan word I du beg of 'ee, my swait, to shut thez eer chap's mouth.

LUKE. Tek a drop o' liquor to clear thy droat, an' then caal out agen!

NICK. Spaik, my dear — I du knaw yez awnly on the other side of the curtains — an' ye can heer ivvery word I'm spaiking. Won't 'ee jest show yezzel vor but one momint?

LUKE (*laughs*). Hur ev thrawn 'ee over, like the gude-fur-nort that thee art. Hur's done with 'ee, an' hur'll nivver cum to thee, no, not ef thee dost stan' theere for siven yeer!

NICK. Hur'll nivver cum to me?

LUKE. Naw! not ef thee du split thy droat weth caaling an' beseeching hur — I say hur waun't come to thee.

NICK. By God, hur shall come to me! Barzillai, bring Luke Jago and me a treble portion o' the hottest fire and brimstone stuff as ye've got in thee house, for to drenk to my sawl's ruin an' damnation. (*Very commandingly.*) Dost 'ee 'ear?

(*Exit Brazillai into inn.*)

Grace Mary — harken — I've a sworn that thou shalt cum out to me, an' I'll kape my word ef I lose my sawl vor it.

(*Barzillai re-enters with liquor. Nick, calling up to window.*) I giv' thee wan more chance, Grace Mary. If thee waun't come, I'll drenk to my sawl's everlasting ruin. (*To Barzillai.*) Bring the liquor here.

(*The window curtains are seen to be clutched from within.*)

Aw! Thee dost hear me! Come an' saave me, my love! I command thee. Come, or I'll drenk! (*Takes one glass from Barzillai. To Luke.*) Take thy glass. Drenk to my sawl's everlasting ruin. Will 'ee come? (*Lifting glass to lips.*)

(*The grasp on the window curtains is relaxed. A long, terrible shriek from within, and the sound of a body falling. Nick puts down glass, horror-stricken. The next moment the wraith of Grace Mary appears outside the door on the top of the steps.*)

Look! Look!

[*Points at her.*

LUKE. Look where? There 's nort!

NICK. Look! Look! I tould 'ee hur 'd come!

[*Stands pointing.*

LUKE. Theere 's nort theere, ez theere?

NICK. Iss! Iss! Daun't 'ee see hur? Josh! Peter!

JOSHUA. Naw, naw.

PETER. Naw, Nick, I can see nort.

BARZILLAI. Nick, do 'ee come indoors, theere 's a good lad, an' daun't 'ee play weth thy sawl's ruin. Come in oal of ye — it feer makes my blood run cold. Come in.

[*Some of the men withdraw into inn, still looking at Nick, who stands pointing at Grace Mary.*

LUKE. Thee 'rt mazed weth drenk! I tell thee there 's nort theere. Come inside, sonnies! Come in an' lave the fule to ez awn fuling!

NICK (*still points*). Look! Look!

(*Exeunt all into inn except Nick. Going a step toward her.*) Ez ut thee, Grace Mary? (*Rubbing his eyes, trying to collect himself.*) Spaik to me!

GRACE MARY. I 've a-come ut thy bidding, Nick! Thy words did draw the very haart out o' my body with luv to thee.

NICK. Say ut again! I did knaw 'twor n't thy awn dear self that shut the door on me.

GRACE MARY. Thee knawest I ud n't. But thy wickedness an' evil ways ev a brokken my haart, Nick.

NICK. I 'll change vrom thes hour. I 'll laive all my wickedness an' maik myself fit vor thee, my awn dear angel.

GRACE MARY. 'T ez vor that I 've come to thee, to maik thee a good true man from thez time foath. Think, my awn dear love, as I 'm a watching ovver thee ivvery momint o' thy life from this time. Theere 's nivver a deed, nor a wish, nor a thought o' thy haart but I shall knaw it. Will 'ee promise me to strive an' kape thyself vrom evil, Nick? 'T ez thy awnly chance of meeting me agen.

NICK. Iss! Iss! But I do see thee naw! Come nearer to me. Let me hauld thee in my arms —

GRACE MARY (*fading away over the sea*). Thee 'lt nivver hauld me in thy arms, nivver see me or spaik to me agen on this earth.

NICK. Grace Mary! Grace Mary! Daun't 'ee laive me, dear. Daun't 'ee laive me!

GRACE MARY (*fading.*) I won't laive 'ee! (*Fading. Nick goes after her towards edge of cliff.*) I 'll watch auver 'ee to the end. I did shut the door upon thee to-night, Nick. But I 'll pray vor the door to be kipt aupen wheere I be gwine.

NICK (*with outstretched arms, following her to the cliff's edge*). Cum back to me, my dear! My haart waun't give thee up! Thee 'rt tied to me in life and death! Cum back to me!

[*Grace Mary fades.*

GRACE MARY'S VOICE. The door shall be kipt aupen vor 'ee. Good-bye.

[*Nick turns round, bewildered, goes up the cottage steps, knocks loudly, comes down steps, and looks up at window.*

[*Enter Isaac from cottage.*

NICK. Graace Mary — dost 'ee knaw?

ISAAC. Iss, I heerd a scream, an' I went upstairs, and theere hur wor — laid on the floor. Hur haart ev brokken vor thee. Hur 's dead! What can us do?

NICK. God giv' me graace, I du main to follow hur, Isaac. (*Speaking toward the space where she has faded.*) I 'll

follow 'ee, my dear. Kape the door aupen vor me.— Isaac, thee waun't shut the door on me now?

ISAAC. Come in. We'll go to hur together.

[*Holds out his hand. Nick takes it. They go into the cottage together.*

CURTAIN

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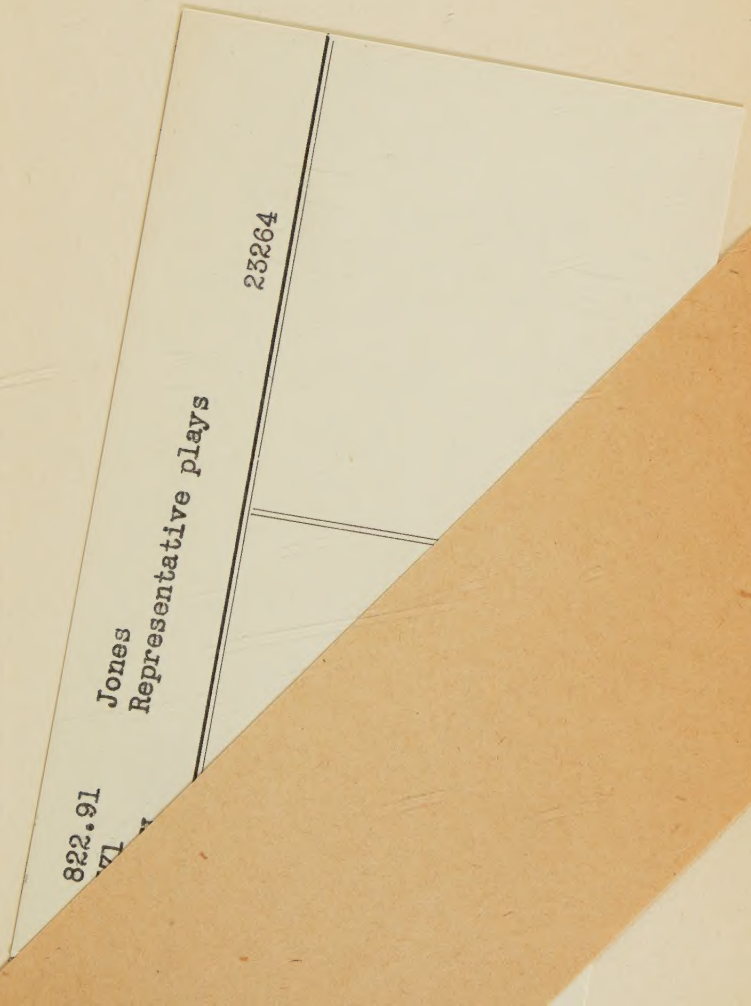
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